

THE PATH OF GLORY

also by George Blake

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THE
PATH OF GLORY

by
GEORGE BLAKE

CONSTABLE & CO LTD
LONDON

PUBLISHED BY
Constable & Company Limited
London W.C. 2

BOMBAY
CALCUTTA MADRAS
LEIPZIG

Oxford University
Press

TORONTO
The Macmillan Company

First published, 1929
Reprinted, 1929

Printed in Great Britain by
MACKAYS LTD., CHATHAM

TO THE MEMORY
of
HUGH ADAM MUNRO

CHAPTER I

FROM the top of a high bank, built up of clinkers and rubble against a fence of railway sleepers, he looked down the football field towards the pavilion and longed for the band to appear. His ears were strained to catch the reedy notes of a bagpipe being tuned.

Already the terraces above the pitch were packed, so that the solid wall of faces and cloth caps had at a distance the neutral tint of gravel. From the remote and lofty recesses of the grand stand came the songs of enthusiasts, banded in belligerent parties to witness battle. The swirling of the crowd near the turnstiles was slowing down, and the clock above the Press box stood at twenty minutes to three. Would they never come, those pipers, and charm the heart of him whose one abiding passion was for the wild music they were to play?

It was not to see the Rangers and the Swifts snarl at each other over a ball that Col Macaulay had shouldered his way to the top of the bank. For him the match had no interest. Somebody had said in the yard that the Territorial pipers were to play before the game, and that was the fact which had embedded itself in Col's misty mind. In a sort of dream, with only this dim, entrancing prospect before him, he had paid his sixpence and struggled to the top of the terrace.

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Col's life had moved mistily since its beginning in a byre in Benbecula twenty years before. His folks had been tinkers—children of the mist are the Macaulays—and with them, up and down the Islands, he had drifted for seventeen years. Little of that experience remained in his consciousness: little save the piping his father had taught him—for purely commercial reasons. But the art became to the son a dear reality, the background of all his conscious thinking, his very existence. Of letters, economy, ambition, he had learned nothing in that vagrant life; only this deep inarticulate love for the art of the bagpipe remained. The vaguest of dreamers in all other things, Col awakened and took on his manhood when he felt the bag fill and belly under his arm.

Yet he had come to the shipyards of Clydeside. It was no result of conscious thinking. Other young men of the Isles were sailing to follow fortune as shipwrights. His one friend, John Macleod, was of the party. It came over Col mistily that he might as well go with them, and mistily he followed the impulse. The change of environment had for him no dramatic quality. From a thatched, peat-smelling croft-house on a wild shore to a room shared with John Macleod in the attic of a tenement in a grey Lowland backstreet—the step was hardly noticed by Col. He was of the tinkers, the Highland tinkers, slow and hazy of mind. As well for him on Clydeside, so long as he had the friendship of John and his love for the bagpipe.

In the yard they called him The Loonie, so complete was his indifference to the realities and stresses of social life. He seemed just to moon around,

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doing what he was told to do ; doing it thoroughly, but with his mind not all there. His mates in the squad ragged him, but affectionately, for he was gentle, willing, strong. His face was fine, his eyes were blue and wistful, and his hair was the colour of flax. He was thin and gawky and he stooped a little, for he was nearly six feet in height. He seemed, even to his rough mates, to be not altogether of the near earth. Always he had to be called back to actuality by men more practical.

Thus as he stood dreaming hopefully on the top of the bank above the stir of the terraces, a rough and cheerful voice hailed him.

"Haw, Loonie!" it cried. "Dis your mother know ye're oot?"

It was one of the squad, Deveney, a bandy-legged Lowlander. Col smiled. Deveney went on jocularly.

"Watch you the sodjers don't get ye. It's re-cruitin' they're here for."

There was, of course, a War on. It had been on since the fourth of August, and this was mid-September. It was still far away from the thousands who waited to see the Rangers and the Swifts at grips in a League game. It had not touched Col at all. The stupendous drama of it had not disturbed his dream. He knew the bare fact ; they were on night-shift at the yard—a submarine building in a locked and guarded shed—but it was outside his range of interest, distant, a rumour merely. And he knew that the Territorials had gathered, for some of his mates were gone ; yet he did not wonder why.

"It's the pipers I am wanting to hear," he explained to Deveney.

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"Ach, to pot wi' the pipers!" exclaimed the little man, roughly impatient. "Whit about the fitba'?"

Col did not hear that impatient question. His blue eyes suddenly lost their vagueness. He saw, streaming out from the pavilion, a band of men. Their green kilts swung gallantly; jaunty was the set of the bonnets on their heads. They formed quickly in fours on the level turf, the westering sun of autumn catching their silver buckles and badges. Up went the arms of the taut young drummers. A crash, and they marched.

Col held his breath. Oh, that heady rattle of drums, that gallant cry of the pipes! And the rhythm of it, the throb, the swing! It cried to the deeps of the boy, spoke to his heart in an idiom he understood completely.

"Ruddy bag o' weasels!" commented Deveney, but Col was above speech and out of hearing. It was the lyric language of his race that held him.

Athole Highlanders they played, that gallant march; and the ribbons fluttered from the pipes exulting. Good piping—they could play; they had the feeling of it, Col knew. His knowledge was instinctive, his taste infallible. He would have given anything to have been one of them.

Round the track once, and the band halted.

"Now for the fitba'," said Deveney hopefully, then mournfully: "O Gees!"

For the pipers were off again. Now it was *The Black Bear* they played, a heady, wild tune. It skirls and skirls, then it breaks off sharply in a sort of feral syncopation, and two beats are filled by a yell

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from the marching men before the pipes take up the air again. Holding himself tight, Col listened in rapture till the band completed a circuit of the field. But when they came to the last refrain and the drums broke off with a throb, he yelled with the pipers.

"For God's sake, Loonie," Deveney protested.

Men looked round at Col and laughed rudely at his outburst. He coloured: not for shame, but because his dear enthusiasm was being mocked. He was saved by the appearance of the footballers, bounding on to the field in their coloured jerseys and white shorts.

The crowd cheered. Loud isolated voices bawled rough encouragement. A cornettist, precariously seated on the fence of sleepers, burst plangently and irrelevantly into "Come Back to Erin." Swiftly the players dispersed to positions. A tossing of coins—a spurt of sound from a whistle—a charge of running men. The game had begun.

Col watched its fluctuations without passion. It was new to him, and it was proceeding before his eyes, so that not even his misty mind could ignore it. But he did not roar with the passionate Scots crowd, he did not hold his breath when raids went sweeping down on the goal-mouths. All these proceedings made but an accompaniment to his brooding.

His mind was ranging, exulting. The showy pride of a pipe-band in full swing had gone to his head. He dreamed of sharing that glory of swagger and vaunt, of playing in that gorgeous chorus, of mounting on his own enthusiasm of piping to perfect bliss. And always in his head rang that braggart tune, *The*

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Black Bear, singing war and the fierce delights of it. His right foot beat an impatient tattoo on the cinders.

So time passed over him till the footballers stopped for rest. Then he came to life again and watched the door of the pavilion. At last the squat but jaunty figure of the Pipe Major appeared to lead his men on to the field once more.

"Holy Jings, Loonie!" groaned Deveney. "Here's these blocks again."

Col smiled gently but did not deign to answer. The moment of his special happiness approached.

They marched again, the pipers, twice round the track, and it was *The Burning Sands of Egypt*, a jaunty tune, they played. They wheeled to the right up the middle of the field, and in the centre formed a circle. The drums broke time, and the tune changed to the tripping rhythm of a strathspey. The dance they played now, the dainty foursome of the North. Then again the drums rattled into yet another rhythm, quick and wild. The pipes followed, skirling. Now it was the reel, the glad quick eightsome, with a hint of ferocity in its wildness. It sang the mad moments of a race.

Col stood entranced. Joy, joy—it was all joy within him, hearing those strains. The tunes and the reedy voices of the pipes intoxicated him. He was away, out of the grey town, beyond the dim terraces of cinders, into the dark country of the Gael and the old memories of his people.

The blatant, jocular voice of Deveney crashed into his dream.

"Haw, Loonie," it cried. "Here's a sodger comin' to nab ye."

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Col, awakened, stared into the brown face of a kilted lance-corporal and heard a friendly voice.

"Here, chum," asked the soldier, "are you coming to join up?"

Col stared. This man, it dawned on him, was a comrade of the pipers. He was near them, could speak to them. He stammered.

"Will you be wanting a piper?"

"Pipers!" exclaimed the soldier. "We could be doing with a dozen pipers. Are you coming?"

The horrified voice of Deveney broke in.

"Haw, Loonie! For God's sake! Ach, ye're a blurry fool!"

But the soldier was moving purposefully towards the pavilion, Col at his heels. Deveney's plea, pained but reasonable, followed him in vain.

"Haw, Loonie——"

But Col did not hear it. He followed the soldier through the crowd to the tin shanty at the far end of the field.

Inside the pavilion, the lance-corporal stiffened before a young officer.

"Recruit, sir. Says he's a piper."

The officer emptied a tumbler and replaced it on the mantelpiece.

"Good," he said. He looked at Col quizzically. "You'll do. Have you a pal who would join with you?"

"There's John Macleod," said Col eagerly. "He's a piper, too."

"Good Lord! How many pipers!" The officer turned and called to the open door. "Pipe Major! Do you want two recruits for your band?"

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"Very good, sir." The stocky man appeared rapidly and saluted.

"Have to be trained as stretcher-bearers, of course," muttered the officer. He turned to Col. "Name and address?"

Then—

"Come to the Drill Hall at seven to-night with your friend. And no shenanikin, or I'll send a guard for you."

Col found himself outside with the Pipe Major. The Pipe Major spoke to him in Gaelic, and Col's heart leaped. He felt safe, among friends. The Pipe Major questioned him, then promised him happiness.

"You'll get piping to your heart's content. Away you now and fetch John Macleod."

The football match was still being played, but Col slipped out into the deserted side-street and loped off to carry these great tidings to his friend.

John Macleod was seated by the window of the bare room they shared in Stanners Street. He was in his shirt-sleeves; through the open window, out into the jaded sunlight of the autumn afternoon, drifted the melancholy tune he was coaxing from a chanter. The music did not cease at Col's entrance. He was welcomed by the eyes of John, prominent and interrogative over his bulging and industrious cheeks.

"John!" cried Col, and at the excitement in the tone the small man took his lips reluctantly from the mouthpiece of his instrument. "John! I have joined the soldiers!"

John's ox-eyes stared out of a red, beefy face.

"God!" he ejaculated simply.

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Then he stood up, a short, stocky figure, and wiped the mouthpiece of his chanter on the seat of his trousers.

"What made you do that?" he asked.

"It was for the piping, John. Do you see—it is pipers they are wanting. The band was playing. God, but yon was grand, grand! You should have heard them. *The Black Bear* . . . John, they will take the two of us for pipers, so they will."

"Will they indeed?" repeated John mildly. He pulled on his jacket and spoke calmly. "Well, I suppose we might be doing worse. I had an uncle was at Magersfontein, so he was. Come on, then, Col."

They went out into the street. Making for the Rue End, they heard, thin above the clangour of traffic, the thud of drums, then the wail of the pipes.

"They will be coming back now," said Col. "Wait you . . ."

He stood listening. Then his face glowed.

"It is *The Black Bear* again. Is that not splendid!"

The column approached and passed, and they fell into step at the rear of it. They could yell now when the rattling drums broke off in that syncopation which gives the tune of *The Black Bear* its special quality of savagery. Into their Highland hearts flooded the emotions of glory. They were absurdly proud to be of this taut column, arrayed for war. It was ecstasy to pass in that glorious company through the crowded main streets of the town.

To the daft tune of *Hielan' Laddie* the party swung in through the gates of a parade ground and

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was dismissed. The Pipe Major condescended grandly to his new recruits.

"Come you," he said in the Gaelic, "and we'll put you through."

In a gaunt chamber as bare as a schoolroom they were told to strip, and they stood there naked till an officer in pince-nez looked up from a littered desk.

"Oh, these two are all right. Let's see their papers . . ."

Col and John dressed again, but it did not occur to them to question the emptiness of the ritual. They are a meek and acquiescent race, the people of the Isles. A corporal hurried them into another bare room.

"Wait here till I get the officer," he said.

Hat in hand, sheepish and silent, they waited before a sparsely-furnished table. For five minutes they stood there, strange victims of a process which for them had no reason in it. Their only want was to become pipers in the band. A boy officer with a preoccupied face hurried in and spoke curtly.

"Hold up your hands. No, one hand only. No, the other hand . . ." he smiled faintly; "Now repeat after me."

And Col and John took the great oath.

I swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, his heirs and successors . . .

They did not know what it meant, this polysyllabic shibboleth of a foreign tongue. They understood it simply as a part of the business of becoming pipers in the band.

"Right!" said the young officer, and shouted: "Corporal!"

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They were told that they were free for the rest of the evening, and they occupied the time in packing up their few belongings and leaving Stanners Street for ever.

When they returned to the Drill Hall at ten, they found the vast expanse of its floor covered with young men, their brown blankets and their clothes. Noise filled the air. In some corners hung the sickly smell of whisky. A sergeant and three corporals were yelling loudly and at large.

"Lights out! Come on! That recruit over there—shut yer flakin' mouth! Come on! Lights out! Well, get yer blankets, ye young —— and shut up! Come on! Lights out!"

Din and confusion. A corporal pounced on Col and John, sheepish amid the clamour.

"Here, youse two. Blankets in the store there. Jump to it. Come on!"

They got blankets and found three square yards of unencumbered space near a draughty archway. They imitated their comrades and lay down to sleep in shirt, socks and trousers. There were friendly advances from lads about them.

"Juist jined up, chum!" Then with a cynical laugh: "Poor bloody eediots!"

Col and John smiled meekly.

"Crivvens! Can ye no' speak?" grumbled a truculent neighbour.

The din subsided slowly. At last the lights went out. Col began to feel the hardness of a wooden floor on the shoulderblades. The draught from the archway chilled and stiffened his neck. But he was above the crudities of his situation. He did not hear the snores, the muffled curses, the furtive laughter

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about him. Nor did he smell the stale breath and sweat from his companions. His mind was full of the picture of himself, proud and splendid in a green kilt, blowing the wild tune of *The Black Bear*.

John Macleod, more placid, snored beside him, his mouth open, his lips quivering to every breath expelled.

CHAPTER II

HAVING got them into its firm, dispassionate power, the Army lost interest in Col Macaulay and John Macleod as individuals. These two, having enlisted in order that they might freely enjoy the pleasures of music, found that the promise was but a mirage.

It mystified them. Neither had paused to think of all that goes to the making of a soldier. Indeed, they had thought of soldiers and pipers as being, somehow, of separate species. There was nobody to explain, no friendly creature to enlighten their dumb ignorance. The Pipe Major had departed from headquarters with his band to the outlying billets of A Company. The staff at the Drill Hall did not see occasion to explain the workings of the military machine to two nonentities among the hundreds of recruits the first war-fever was calling up. Col and John subsided inconspicuously into the mass of shipyard-hands, clerks, farm labourers, shopkeepers and loafers whom a political accident beyond their comprehension had fortuitously banded together.

They did not complain, these two, for they had the ox-like brains of the Highland peasant, incapable of enterprise. They did not even voice to each other the mutual disappointment. They were simply overwhelmed and dazed by war's absurd exigencies, and they surrendered meekly to the vast pressures of a racial crisis. Recruits they were for the time,

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bits of raw material. The rigours of the recruit's intolerable existence filled their lives for two solid months.

"Wait you till we get into the band. . . " Col would say hopefully to John.

"Och, the band!" John would reply vaguely, without illusion.

And the band had disappeared—a shadowy decoy that had lured them into this strange, noisy, crowded world of the army. They were saved from despair by the fatalism of their race. Col and John had no protest to make against chance; they could not communicate with the more vivid Lowland minds of their comrades and enjoy the relief of the soldier's "grouse." They were left to themselves, the two Highlanders, and humorously tolerated as wandered aliens. Only through Deveney, he who had protested against Col's enlistment on the football field, did they touch the mass mind of the recruits.

Deveney, too, had been caught up in the machine. He explained the accident with the reckless humour of his kind.

"Ach t' hell! There's nae use tryin' to keep oot of it. All the boys from the yaird went an' jined up, an' they left me wi' a squad of ould blocks wi' beards to their knees. That put the lid on it; so I juist ups and gets as fou' as a puggie, an' here ye are. We're all a lot o' ruddy eediots onyway."

Deveney did not regard his own plight as quite so pitiful as that of Col and John. In himself he had the Scot's complete confidence. The simplicity of the Highlander, on the other hand, touched his sentimentality.

"Youse two blocks," he would say, "are a poor

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bloomin' pair o' sodgers. Ye're too flakin' gentle, that's whit ye are. See here, Loonie, d'ye know whit I'd dae if I was you? I'd hit that block, Lowrie, a shot on the ear."

It had never occurred to Col that he might so retaliate on the corporal in charge of the squad of which he was a unit. He smiled patiently at Deveney's vehemence. Col suffered, but it never once occurred to him to complain.

Corporal Lowrie was of that type which is the Army's ideal of a good soldier and is, at the same time, the Army's most damnable product. Smart, eager, and obsequious before officers, he was a bully and a cad with his men. He had been chosen specially to train recruits, and had been sent, to acquire smartness, to the Guards' School at Chelsea. He had come back to his Territorial recruits cherishing a slick, brutal theory of parade-ground efficiency. His sojourn with the Guards had blown his vanity and cultivated the rich vein of coarseness in him; his was just the mind to accept that violent, showy theory of training men for war. The officers were proud of Corporal Lowrie. He was a good soldier.

It was inevitable that Col should be the butt of his passions of vituperation and of his hob-nailed sarcasm. Col's long limbs were gawky, and Col's mind was hazy. He delighted Lowrie by blundering inveterately. To the end of it, he could not be trusted to form fours with certainty.

Forming fours. They started with that. Hour after hour over the cinders. Odd numbers stand fast—even numbers two paces step back, one pace to the right. One: one—two. Macaulay—waken up, man. Pack drill for you, blasted fool that you

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are! Form—two deep. Macaulay again—thus Lowrie sarcastic—will we get your mother to waken you? Titters from the sycophants. Stop that laughing, blast you! Come, now! SQUAD—

And if Col stumbled into smartness, Lowrie would turn them right about and confuse him with the new order. Lowrie would appeal to the Virgin Mary and her Son . . . Hour after hour, day after day.

Col did his best. He did not understand why these things should be done, and it was not in Lowrie to explain to his pupils. Perhaps he could not have explained at all. The Guards did it so. It was gospel, divinely inspired.

Then there was musketry. Col had by nature the temperament of a dead shot. But Lowrie spoke in terms of Triangles of Error, Trajectories, Elevation. He used words Col did not understand, and he did not stop to expound. It was easier to hold the tall and gentle Highlander up to the ridicule of the class, abusing him, fleering, patronising in his softer moments. Lowrie enjoyed his orgy of ridicule.

Then there was Fixing Bayonets—the biggest achievement of military science according to Lowrie. The process demands that the man at the end of the front rank shall step forward and by his actions give the tempo of the ritual for the rest. It was Lowrie's trick to put Col in the place of honour.

"Squad . . . Fix . . ."

Then he waited, while Col dreamed in his place. Lowrie would fall back on conversational irony.

"In your own time, Macaulay. Don't let me disturb you. Can I get you something from the Canteen?" Then fiercely: "Holy Moses, you

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blurry big fool ! You're the blurriest cow that ever stepped. Jump to it, you clod. Now. Fix . . ."

And Col would go ambling two paces forward. Always his bayonet jammed in its sheath, and the core of Lowrie's creed would be violated. His language came from foul depths.

Col simply did not understand. The procedure of drill had no meaning. Even the sarcasm and bullying of Lowrie passed him by. None of it was of a quality that his mind could take in. He suffered only from the sordid monotony of it all, dumbly, dimly, for he did not question life. He was remote from all its little passions.

Deveney and John Macleod were more vehement.

"Holy Mike, Loonie," Deveney would say "You ought to be polishing a bullet for that mug's back."

"I'll knife him yet, so I will," John Macleod would mutter.

"Och, what's the odds ? " Col would ask, mild and sadly smiling.

At the halt on the left form squad. ("That's right, Macaulay. Your left's your right, as usual.") As you were. Slope—hipe ! ("Take your time, Macaulay. Don't mind me.") Present—hipe ! Slope—hipe ! Quick—mark time ! Forward ! At the halt on the left . . .

Hours and hours, days and days, weeks and weeks of that.

Gradually there passed from Col the hope of becoming a piper. The vision faded and left him helpless. There was not even the satisfaction of wearing the green kilt of the regiment. Supplies of clothing and equipment were short, and this son of a kilted race was given a pair of khaki slacks to wear and a blue

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tunic left over from the South African War. Only the glengarry with the dicing and its large white metal badge marked him as a Highland soldier.

These little things counted, intensifying the bleakness of Col's life. It needed the garb of old Gaul and the consciousness of a piper's pride to give him individuality, keenness, manhood. But the Army had got him and absorbed him. He was just a soldier, nay, a ruddy recruit, in the phrase of Corporal Lowrie. Strength Returns accounted for him as one of 960 Other Ranks. He was being made into one of those impersonal entities whom Commanders-in-Chief were to describe in their dispatches as "rifles."

Col did not count. Worse than that, he did not know or care that he did not count. It was left to John Macleod to speak for the alliance.

John Macleod was stocky and fiery and proud. It was he who fought for Col in the rough-and-tumble of the barrack room and suffered for the indignities put upon him by Lowrie. It was John who ordered their lives, so far as the Army had no control over them. Col accepted, merely smiling pallidly and dreaming.

They seldom went out at nights on leave. Unlike their comrades, they had no home to seek, and John Macleod was sensitive on the score of their inadequate uniform. So they lay on their blankets in the vast, deserted Drill Hall and played on their chanter. Only one light burned above the door of the Orderly Room, and the end where they lay was in gloom. Draughts swept along the bare, hard floor from under the great sliding doors. The smell from the lavatories was about them. But they were happy in their music, these two.

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There were tremendous points of technique to debate. Continually they quarrelled.

"You were wrong with that turn, Col," John would say, cocking a critical head.

"I was not."

"You were so, Col. It's like this," and John would give his version of the passage.

"It is not."

"But it is so." John's neck would begin to redden. "Are you calling me a liar?"

"I am so. You are talking like a fool."

There would be silence between them on that, and each would take to playing, defiantly, a different tune, till the hall was filled with the droning sounds of the competing reeds. It was like a nest of angry bees, and it would last till a distracted Orderly Room clerk opened the door and roared at them.

"For the love o' God——"

When the door had closed again, John would look reproachfully at Col and say:

"Man, Col, but you are a fool!"

"Fool yourself!" Col would indignantly retort.

It was a serious business, piping: for those two the most serious and significant function of existence. Peasants of the poor islands, they held their art high and holy. A disagreement over its subtleties was as grave for them as a schism of faith for mediæval churchmen. So it is always with the Gael. In the dark inns of Highland towns, crowded with the rag, tag and bobtail of the annual Games, one may still see the flash of steel as fervid purists draw to defend a point of æsthetics.

Their fast and inevitable friendship could not

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stand between Col and John when the anger of such an issue heated the blood within them. They came to blows one night of late October.

It was over the fingering of an air that both had experimentally essayed. The argument was reasonable at first, but they found each other obdurate, and the fires of enthusiasm flared up. It came to an obstinate deadlock of opinion; they got beyond reason and sympathy.

"I am telling you, Col Macaulay, that you are wrong."

"And I am telling you, John Macleod, that I am right."

The pitch of the voices rose gradually, echoing threats over the empty hall. They glared at each other, and their reddened faces came nearer and nearer.

"You are a stupid fool, Col Macaulay."

"Fool yourself—you pig!"

"Pig!" shrieked John. "Tinker's trash that you are!"

Then they were at each other's throats, aching to hurt, to inflict agonising pain. They rolled over on their blankets, grappling wildly, John Macleod below. Col's wild eye lighted on the dark handle of his bayonet in its scabbard. He tugged the blade free. Up it swept. . . .

A strong hand gripped his right wrist. He was thrown off John's stomach on to his back.

"You blurry young murderer!" The hard face of Corporal Lowrie scowled at Col. "Bayonets, be Christ! Up, ye swine."

Col was jerked to his feet and led, meek now, across the hall to the miniature rifle range.

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"You're under arrest," said Lowrie, and pushed him into that cold, black tunnel. The door was locked on him. Wondering, he spent the night there. But he slept naturally. It did not strike him as a grave thing that he had drawn steel on his friend in a just quarrel. He missed John from his side.

Next morning he found himself again under the direct, mysterious control of the Army. An armed guard appeared and marched him through a narrow door into a part of the building he had never seen before. There was a carpet of the regimental tartan on the stairs. The Sergeant-Major received him on the top landing.

"Off with his bonnet!" roared the Sergeant-Major so loudly that Col started back. The corporal of the guard snatched the glengarry from his head. Col was marched into a great warm room. He was left at attention before a table at which two officers were sitting. A stern man of fifty or thereabouts looked up.

"Conduct sheet," he said crisply.

The younger officer by his side pushed over a flimsy paper. The older officer read.

"Bayonet assault. Good God!" Then to the Sergeant-Major:

"Witnesses."

"Corporal Lowrie," bawled the Sergeant-Major.

The corporal stepped in, jaunty and exact, saluted, and spoke as if his tongue reproduced the tale of a gramophone record.

"Sir, on the night of the fourteenth, on returning to the billet. . . ."

The story came pat and damning. A good

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soldier, Corporal Lowrie. He told how he had averted murder.

Then he saluted, turned about and disappeared, his duty done.

"Anybody else, Sergeant-Major?"

"Yes, sir. Private Macleod!"

They had to push John through the ritual. And John was there to speak for the defence. Not all their hectoring would make him damn his friend. A friendly and natural dispute—that was his point. He could not see the offence as a good soldier should.

"Och, just a bit turn-up," he amiably explained the fight.

The older officer breathed a sigh of relief. He turned to his adjutant.

"Not a Court Martial case, anyhow," he said. "Thank God!"

Then he glared at Col with such sudden intensity that the prisoner blinked. The officer's mouth opened, and there issued from it a more fluent tirade of abuse than ever Col had believed possible in the English tongue. He was a fool, it appeared: various kinds of adjectival fool. Disgrace to the regiment. Trusting adjectival fools with bayonets. . . . A fierce and fluent objurgation.

"Twenty-one days' detention."

That seemed to be the end.

"About—TURN!" yelled the Sergeant-Major.

They led Col away, a dazed and wondering innocent, to three weeks of pain and misery. It hurt him most that he could not see John Macleod before they took him to Stirling Castle.

The lance-corporal and the private who conducted him through in the train promised him novel

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agonies in his place of punishment. The spectacular terrors of detention had become legendary among the Territorials. The lance-corporal chuckled grimly.

"By Jings, chum, they'll put you through it," he said. And the private added his voice to the duet of gloating.

"Be Gees, they will!" he swore. "They broke Willie Cameron's ankle on him."

Thus human nature under a terror. It finds sadistic joy in gloating on the power of that which menaces it.

The warnings did not touch Col, for it was not in him to appreciate even the gravity of the offence which was to bring these incredible consequences upon him. He had no feeling of guilt; he knew only a vague wonder as to the nature of the fury he had invoked. He did not understand, and nobody had explained.

His fatalism helped him through the long weeks of imprisonment. The punishments did not break him, since he had neither shame nor any quarrel with his taskmasters. It merely disappointed him dully that soldiering had led him at length into the power of a group of such as Corporal Lowrie.

There is no cruelty like an organised and tolerated cruelty. In the dark detention barracks lurked the ugliest spirit of the Old Army. The prisoners, Col among them, were punished simply: there was no attempt to reform. They scrubbed endless passages and were cursed for slowness. With aching backs they carried heavy weights up a slippery slope of grass—then carried them down again in meaningless sequence. They did hours upon hours of pack drill;

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marching without a moment of rest, laden with fifty pounds of kit, up and down a featureless parade ground, the yelping incessant voice of a sergeant ever in their ears. Defaulters were brutally handled. More than one was tied, spread-eagled and helpless, to the wheel of a limber-waggon.

At night, Col was locked alone in a cell. Always he was stiff, sore, miserable, and vaguely resentful. But he did not burn with anger. He used to lie on his planks and wonder what they had done with John Macleod. Sometimes he thought of the Islands. Often he fingered a silent pipe-tune on the handle of his wooden spoon. In his mind was the glimmering of a fear that this imprisonment was to last for ever. He had not fully understood the Colonel.

They let him go at last. His meekness had saved him from complications. Some of the N.C.O.s had taken advantage of his dullness to abuse him, but most had passed him over as colourless and obedient. They let him go.

He was pale, and he felt a little dizzy as he climbed into the train for Glasgow. He feared that some further difficulties awaited him on his return to the battalion. But his mind was soothed and stimulated by the possibility of seeing John Macleod again.

CHAPTER III

THE Orderly Room received him calmly. Its mysterious occupants did not stare at a miscreant, a criminal, returned from detention. All they saw was a recruit on the strength again. And it was high time that this recruit joined his Company.

"Macaulay? C. Macaulay?" murmured the O.R. clerk, fumbling with the blue leaves of a long book. "Right. Here y'are. A Company. Billets at Cults Farm. Buzz off, chum."

Col stared at this glib official, and the clerk looked up again.

"What is it?" he asked, then swore. "Holy Jings, ye'd best get a kilt on ye. Q.M. Stores. Over there—door wi' the broken pane. Buzz off."

It amazed Col. His humility had anticipated curses. Now they were in a hurry to make him a soldier. The Quartermaster-Sergeant threw a kilt, hose-tops and puttees at him. Actually they served him with a clean tunic in place of that which the dirty work at Stirling had ruined. They gave him a rifle, a complete outfit of the new web equipment, a bright tin pannikin.

The Quartermaster-Sergeant appealed to Heaven as he watched Col fumble with this complicated outfit.

"Holy Gees! Some fine ruddy sodgers we're getting nowadays."

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But he was a kindly man, though gruff, and he seemed to take an artist's interest in equipping Col for war.

"There now. That'll do ye. No—wait you till I give yer pack a lift. There—that'll do. Man, but yer lass'll be proud to see ye this night."

He smiled on Col. It had been for the Quartermaster-Sergeant a slack day. But his little attentions delighted Col and purged him of much of that feeling of guilt which detention had hammered into him. And Oh, but he was proud, proud as he marched down the road, his green kilt swinging, to where A Company lay in billets at Cults Farm.

Again it seemed to him, when he arrived at his destination, that he had fallen softly. The Company Sergeant-Major had a red round face, blue eyes, and the manner of the jollier sort of Y.M.C.A. enthusiast. (A relic of the old Volunteer days, this C.S.M.) With Col he shook hands; he hoped that Col would be happy in A Company.

"Fine officers, fine men. We've a reputation in this Company, boy."

He led Col up a ladder and into what had been the hay-loft of the farm. He waved a hospitable arm.

"There ye are, my man." It was the voice of an innkeeper. "You can settle down here—here, in this corner. You'll be nice and out the draughts there. And you'll get your tea in half an hour. The Company's out on a route-march."

Col disposed of his kit and wandered out to look about him. A feeling of elation was on him. Corporal Lowrie, the bleak Drill Hall, Stirling—that was miraculously all of the past. He took in unconsciously the homeliness of the old farm build-

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ings, nestling in the lee of a green hill that rose steeply to a rocky peak commanding the River. It was all quiet, restful. He heard the old, familiar lowing of cows in the byre and knew again the rich smells of earth and raw vegetable matter. A great kitchen fire cheerily defied the clear cold of the winter evening through a low window. A servant lass in the striped petticoat of agriculture crossed the yard, staggering between brimming pails of milk. Col could see the C.S.M. in a tiny office, bent over papers under the soothing light of a paraffin lamp.

It was, somehow, like coming home. It only wanted John Macleod. . . . An uneasy feeling came over him at the thought. Who were to be his new friends?

A rough voice, calling from a shed on the other side of the yard, startled him. Col loped across and looked into a den, where a fat, moist little man stood beside a bubbling cauldron and over a huge oven of rough clay.

"Hullo, chum," the tubby man hailed him genially. "Juist jined up? That's right. This is where yer chuck comes from—mind that. I'm Harry Barley, the cook. That's me, s'elp me God."

Harry Barley looked more like a blacksmith. His face was filthy with soot from his fires: the chubby paws with which he handled the company's meat seemed to be encrusted. But his greasy, sallow face was wrinkled with good humour.

"I used to be a plumber," he explained to Col, "but it's a great tear the cookin'. Gees, I could bile ye a coo, and ye'd think it was potted heid. Oh, it's a great tear, right enough."

He drew a roast from his oven, sniffed at it critic-

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ally, and pushed it back with the toe of a canvas shoe.

"That's for the officers. Takes a bit o' doin', a roast." Then he dropped the conversational tone and leapt towards his cauldron. "Christ! There's the Company comin', an' this tea no' near the bile."

Col stepped to the door of the shed. He heard, approaching down the lane, the thud of drums with the wail of the pipes thin above the beating. A lump came to his throat.

*Where have you been a' the day,
Hielan' laddie, Hielan' laddie?*

The braggart marching tune of the regiment, coming nearer and nearer, till it filled the courtyard with clamour. Round the gable of the barn swung the column, file upon file of taut young men, proud and precise.

"Company—Halt!" A high voice yelped.
"Right—turn!"

The long ranks closed with a click.

"Dis—miss!"

And like a roomful of schoolboys suddenly released the men ran, cheering, for the hayloft. As they passed the shed, some cried to Harry Barley, the universal benefactor.

"C'mon, Harry! Up wi' your dish-watter!"

Col looked on with brimming eyes. He could have cheered at this friendliness, this richness of hearty masculinity. His comrades. . . . Then he found himself in the arms of John Macleod.

They were separated by the approach of the Pipe Major, who came, benevolent and pompous, to lead

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Col before Captain Ogilvie. The ceremony took place in the bare little room—once the farm dairy—in which Col had seen the Company Sergeant-Major at work. The C.S.M. was still there, but the Pipe Major, professionally jealous, took care that the introduction of the new recruit should be in his own hands.

Col contrived to salute with some approach to smartness. Now he had an inspiration to do so. The ruddy clean-shaven face of a big man in his late thirties was raised to regard his; a pair of china blue eyes surveyed him from head to foot.

"Another piper, Pipe Major?" asked Captain Ogilvie. "H'm. The band's big enough as it is. What do you think, Sergeant-Major?"

Under the Pipe Major's challenging glare, the C.S.M. was benevolently non-committal.

"Well, sir. Perhaps as you say . . ."

Col's heart sank. He realised very clearly that his destiny was being debated. His pale blue eyes sent a pitiful S.O.S. to the Pipe Major.

"After all, sir," the Pipe Major argued, "there's only three pipers actually on the strength of A Company. You'll want them all on detachment . . ."

"Oh, all right," said Captain Ogilvie, admitting defeat. "Take him away. And look here, my lad—"

Col jumped.

"—if I find you in trouble, out of the band you'll come and into the ranks."

Col was taken away. The Army had placed him in his niche. Piper Col Macaulay, No. 17805. That was that.

He was glad to be so placed, and free to devote

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himself to the one thing that truly interested him. Outside the Orderly Room, John Macleod waited in the dark and muddy courtyard under the winter stars to take charge of his friend's education as a piper of A Company.

Above them, in the loft, the soldiers were clamorous. The hospitable light of paraffin lamps streamed out in a warm shaft of kindly radiance that lost itself in the darkness of the northern night. Exultant, yet half afraid, Col could hear his comrades salute the arrival of Harry Barley and his myrmidons with the mess-tins.

A rough voice bawled a rhetorical question :

"Whit did we have for breakfast, boys ? "

And the chorus crashed :

"Stew ! "

Again : "What did we have for dinner ? "

"Stew ! "

Once more : "What did we have for supper ? "

"STEW ! "

A roar of laughter. Then three cheers for Harry Barley. Hurrah ! Hurrah ! Hurrah ! Then Harry Barley's voice above the tumult.

"C'mon, you lot of puddens, an' eat yer tea."

More laughter, followed by the crisp yelp of the Orderly Sergeant.

"C'mon ! C'mon ! None o' yer nonsense ! Order, now."

The tumult subsided to a hum of conversation, broken by an occasional peal of mirth from a group and the clank of Harry Barley's dixies. A Company seemed to be a happy family.

"Come on, then, Col," said John Macleod, "and we will have a bite of food."

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The band formed a mess by itself in a privileged corner of the loft. Among these good fellows, Col found himself speaking Gaelic and arguing vividly. He was warmly proud of being among these his friends, the pipers. It was as if, after weeks of submission to a monotonous obliteration, he had come to the pride of life again. He was excited greatly by a rumour which said that A Company was to attempt a thirty-mile route-march on the following day. The officers had made a bet with a major of militia in the camp down the road. . . . A Company would do it. The rank-and-file of the band, emboldened by the absence of the Pipe Major in the Sergeants' Mess, sketched a programme of the tunes they would play to lift the Company over the long Scots miles.

After tea, John and Col walked out together on leave, two gallant figures in kilts. Hysterical young women whistled after them seductively, but they did not pause to answer such invitations. Their talk was masculine, soldierly—of piping and A Company and the band. They were men who had achieved an ambition together.

"If only they could see us in Ardtornish this night!" said Col proudly.

"God, but they would stare!" agreed John.

It happened that they came to a public-house just at this moment of exultation. They entered and ordered whisky to mark the occasion.

"*Slainte! Slainte!*" They drank to each other.

It gratified them immensely that the barman asked their views on the progress of the War. It was a subject of which neither Col nor John had the least

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knowledge, but the vanity of the Gael helped them through.

"Och," said John largely, "we're doing fine! Wait you till the Territorials has a slap at them Germans. It will all be over before next summer is out."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," said the barman respectfully.

Meanwhile Col had marked with pleasure how a middle-aged woman at the bar was running an appreciative eye over his own tall figure. He wished that she could see him at the head of A Company with the bagpipe under his oxters.

They marched home over the frosty pavements briskly, keeping strict step. Deep bells, borne on the nor'west wind across the bay, were beating ten as they swung into the lane that led to Cults Farm. They were halted by a sentry's sharp challenge:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Friend," pealed John with confidence.

"Advance, friend," returned the rough Clydeside voice, grappling with the formal phrases: "Advance, friend, and be reckernised."

The friends marched up to the steady point of a gleaming bayonet. Then they were hailed by a gust of coarse laughter.

"Gees Oh, Loonie!" cried the voice of Deveney. "Are you in this bunch tae?"

Another old friend. Breaking all the laws of discipline, Deveney held his rifle in one hand and with the other pumped at Col's arm.

"Crivvens," he cried genially, "I thought they'd kill ye in Stirling. Man, I'm glad to see yer silly old dial again."

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He smiled up at Col.

"Christ, Loonie! Ye're wan o' the nuts, right enough."

And Col's cup was full. The welcome of Deveney had placed him finally and decisively in the ranks of the faithful, among friends. He slept well that night, warm among his comrades.

Reveill  was early next morning, but Col jumped briskly to his feet. For bugles were barred in that camp, and it was the orderly piper, blowing *Johnny Cope* in the ringing courtyard, that had wakened him. Groans of mock misery came from the huddled groups in the loft, but Col hurried down the ladder to look out at the morning. A bright star still hung in the blue above the Craigs, but the eastern sky was paling for the dawn. The smell of frost was about, enriched by the sweet odour of cut turnip. Across the courtyard gleamed Harry Barley's morningfires. Col was hailed by that industrious man.

"Hullo, chum! Champion morning!"

It was a legend in the Company that Harry Barley never slept. He granted Col the astonishing favour of a pail of hot water in which to wash and, while the piper splashed, talked at large.

"Early breakfast this morning, chum. The whole flakin' Company's to be out o' here by eight o'clock. Route march, ma lad. Ye'll get yer fill o' pipin' the day."

"Are you going?" asked Col.

"Me!" cried Harry Barley. "Ever see the Company daein' anything big without me? I'm goin', an' don't you mistake it. I've feet on me like a pair o' black puddens—that's thae damned sand-shoes for ye—but I'll go or bust."

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He seized his pail, and, omitting to rinse it, refilled it at a tap in the wall and emptied it into his cauldron of tea.

"Away you now," he ordered Col, "an' get thae lazy blocks oot their beds."

Soon the courtyard was filled with clamour while the men washed and larked in the chill air. Col busied himself happily in a corner with the pipes that the Pipe Major had found for him. Rough soldiers called rudely to him :

"Hey, piper ! Wha killed the cat ? "

But Col only smiled and went on until the mess-call brought him in for breakfast. Through that meal he hurried, and it was as well, for the Corporal-Piper sent him down immediately to play the fall-in for the Company.

Bundle and Go, a cheerful tune, he played out there, marching up and down, while the men came clattering down the wooden steps, urged by the cries of the sergeants. They assembled quickly : they were keen in those days. The long ranks ordered themselves miraculously. Col broke off and took his place in the band on the right of the line.

The officers appeared, brisk and tidy. The C.S.M. clicked before Captain Ogilvie.

"All present and correct, sir."

Then :

"Company—Form—~~four~~*s* ! Right ! By the left, quick—*March !* "

A crash, and they were off, two hundred strapping men marching proudly. It was the *Athole Highlanders* the pipers played, and Col, near mad with pride and joy in the rear rank of the band with John Macleod, blew as if he would burst his lungs.

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They turned eastwards to climb through the town up to the old moorland road. Children ran to the windows to see them pass, and housemaids, with kilted coats on the doorsteps, blushed at the vows of affection that were shouted to them from those swinging ranks. All the dogs in the town came scampering after them and barked joyfully to be with so many men on a morning walk. They leaped in ecstasy to catch the green ribbons blowing from the pipes. For if a dog will bay at a cornet, he goes nearly mad with delight when the bagpipe passes.

Up and up they climbed through the morning streets, four hundred, five hundred feet, till they came to the plateau above the town and the moors, stretching wide and brown under the pale winter sky. Now they marched at ease, and the men sang foolish, tuneful songs when the band was silent.

*Whiter than the whitewash on the wall,
Whiter than the whitewash on the wall—
Wash me in the water where you washed your
dirty daughter,
And I shall be whiter than the whitewash on the
wall.*

Then the band would take up *The 79th's Farewell to Gibraltar*, to be followed by the insane chorus of Mark Sheridan's immortal *Here We Are Again*.

Col enjoyed every moment of the march across the moors. He was happy to hear the rough jests of his comrades behind him, Deveney and Harry Barley prominent in the front rank; he tasted ecstasy when the band played and he was allowed

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to contribute his part to the gusts of wild music that swept over the empty, golden moors. It mattered nothing that there was no public to witness that glory save the startled black-faced sheep. It was good simply to be marching on the top of the world, over a moorland track, all on a crisp winter morning. And then to come down the glen on Largs with shrilling pipes and drums beating, setting the douce folk of the quiet town by the ears!

They had marched fifteen miles by noon, yet the band was hurried from its meal in a church hall to play in the market square a march, strathspey and reel. Then they set out, now along the shore road, for home. By the waters of the Firth, smooth under the westering sun, they marched gallantly. The soldiers sang as they went. They waved and called to cottage women, hurrying with their bairns to the gates.

Night fell when they were still five miles from home, and it was glory to share the strength of the column marching under the stars and to hear the pipes ring through the dark woods of the countryside. They overtook a lorry lumbering empty towards the town, and the wits chaffed Harry Barley, now labouring heavily on his soft feet.

"Come on, Harry!" cried Deveney. "On to the lorry an' get hame alive."

"No dam' fears," growled Harry Barley. "I'll stick it or bust."

It was for the honour of the Company. But there was one straggler among them. A tiny terrier had followed all the way, and now he whined with pain. It was Deveney—drunken shipwright and tough—who picked up the beast and laid him across the

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pack that was already weighing heavy on his shoulders.

"Lie you there, wee man," he said. "I'll no' let ye be bate."

They went on, and the lights of the town came up out of the darkness to cheer them.

"Stick it, Harry!" his comrades called to the labouring cook.

But as they breasted the hill Harry Barley was in extremities. He was soft with weeks of steaming over his ovens. He had striven manfully, but he could no more.

"G'on, Harry!" they urged half-jocular, half-serious—for the honour of the Company.

It was Col who took Harry's heavy rifle and Harry's bulky pack. Held up by the main strength of Deveney on his left and the lance-corporal on his right, the cook dragged his tortured flesh along. It was for the honour of the Company.

They reached the hutments of the militia camp, and even the ranks of Tuscany turned out to cheer. A Company braced its shoulders, and for pride forgot its aches and blisters. The tight column swung up the lane—and Col, carrying the loads of two men, blew like a maniac.

*Where have you been a' the day,
Hielan' laddie, Hielan' laddie?*

Lamplight and the smells of cooking welcomed them in the shadowy courtyard.

"At the halt on the left form close column of—platoons!"

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The voices of the subalterns rang out in quick succession.

Then the Captain's voice :

" A Company—well done ! Dis-miss ! "

It was over. And Harry Barley, in a swift reaction, was being violently and noisily sick. Col and Deveney, the latter with the terrier under his arm, saw him through his agonies. He stood up at last. His eyes, glassy but affectionate, sought theirs.

" Christ, boys ! " he said with deep emotion.
" Ye're a couple of nuts, right enough."

CHAPTER IV

THUS for a time Col Macaulay found that life in the Army was good. The Army fed him, clothed him, paid him, and asked him to do nothing in return save that which he loved best to do. If, while under the power of Corporal Lowrie and at Stirling, he had vaguely questioned the decrees of fate, now he was able *actually to realise and enjoy the good fortune* that had brought him among the soldiers and into the band.

Nine weeks it lasted, this happiness ; throughout the months of October and November, 1914. If A Company was at drill or on field work, the band practised industriously among the whins on the hillside above Cults Farm. Sometimes, though rarely, the battalion as a whole went route-marching, and then it was glory for Col to play for a thousand men. Every Sunday the band marched to the Drill Hall to escort the recruits to church and back again. But they did not seem to belong to the battalion, which was broken up by the exigencies of coast defence. They were of A Company and shared A Company's cheery and self-contained life in its isolated billet. Wherever Headquarters might call them, the pipers were free to return at night to the warm loft and Harry Barley's rations. And the Pipe Major, an astute Highlander, did not suffer his pride in the band and his desire for its prom-

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inence to overcome his appreciation of the quiet life.

Always the billet at night, and the soft lamplight, the rough jests, the smells of cooking. It was such a good billet that many men were content at night to stay indoors and neglect the attractions of music-hall and pub. A dry canteen, managed by one, Johnnie Foster, supplied their need for cigarettes, sweets, and aerated waters.

"Any more for any more?"

So ran Johnnie Foster's business slogan. His light voice yelled the question every hour of the evening, and loudly and continuously between ten o'clock and lights-out. It became a Company joke, a phrase of a genial freemasonry.

Col and John were of those who kept to the Farm when they might have been on leave. They had no home to go to, and the glamour of walking abroad in the kilt rapidly lost its novelty, especially when they realised that the garb of old Gaul shows to little advantage under a greatcoat and in the darkness of a seaport in time of war. So they generally were to be found in the loft, droning experimentally on their chanters. When it was very cold, they were of the privileged company that sat with Harry Barley before his splendid fires and listened to his views on cooking and matrimony, Harry's only topics. Often they were with Johnnie Foster in the glorified cupboard where he stored his goods. Col and John had the tastes of children for sweets and gaseous beverages.

It was with Johnnie Foster one night that Col first encountered a rumour that hinted at an end to the perfection of life in Cults Farm. By virtue of his

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position as canteen manager, Johnnie was the repository of battalion gossip. This evening he hailed the approach of Col and John with good humoured chaff.

"Here's the twa pipers comin' to buy up ma stock. Youse two blocks hev mair money than ye ken whit to dae with. An' devil a stroke of work d'ye dae for it."

He opened and decanted two bottles of Cream Soda.

"Ah, but wait you," he went on mysteriously.

"You pipers is for it soon."

"What's this then, John?" asked Col.

"Ah, ha! You'll get it in the neck, ma lad!"

Johnnie winked elaborately and stooped to slip the empty bottles into a case. He rose above the counter again and delivered his ultimatum. "There's a new Colonel comin'! A reg'lar. I'll bet ye a bob he'll make ye sit up!"

Johnnie turned from their vacantly-staring faces and cried to the world his drawling question.

"Any more for any more?"

Col and John were thoughtful as they went to bed. Next day they forgot the alarm.

It was about a week later that the new Colonel came upon A Company. They were drawn up in the courtyard ready to march out in splendour, when along the lane came the clatter of trotting horses. Captain Ogilvie hesitated over his word of command. Into the courtyard rattled three figures on horseback, the new Colonel, the Adjutant and an orderly. Throwing his reins to the orderly, the Colonel acknowledged Captain Ogilvie's salute.

Then he glared at A Company. He had a heavy, lank moustache and a cold, sodden eye. He looked

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at A Company as if the existence of so many healthy men was a matter that infuriated him. Then he began to walk along the ranks, slouching and peering like a suspicious and quarrelsome animal. The Adjutant, Captain Ogilvie and the C.S.M. followed meekly. It seemed a long time before this funereal procession came to an end. It halted before the resplendent band.

The new Colonel glared at the band. Its smartness clearly displeased him. Sharply he turned away from the pipers and with a gruff word invited Captain Ogilvie out of earshot. Standing stiffly to attention, A Company furtively watched the fluctuations of that colloquy. It understood very well that the band was doomed. It observed that the gloomy face of the new Colonel did not turn to look at A Company as he passed to his horse and rode out of the courtyard.

Even then the permission to stand at ease was not given.

"Pipe Major!"

A salute given and acknowledged, a few words exchanged, a second salute; and the Pipe Major turned to his men. When A Company passed out of Cults Farm that afternoon, Col and John alone blew music for its marching. It was a thin and scrannel duet, and the marching men missed sorely the throb of the drums. The great days of the band were past and gone.

Col and John quarrelled that afternoon, for now they were plunged into a struggle for predominance. The vanity of the piper is an amazing thing, and a man is another creature when he has a bag of music under his oxters. The foolish desire for prominence

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came on these two simultaneously. Friends and coadjutors in the larger band, now they were competitors in a matter of high honour.

It began after the first tune was finished, when the Company was a mile down the road. His face and neck red, John spoke truculently to Col.

"You were wrong with the grace-note in that last turn, Col," he said sternly.

"I was not," cried Col, indignant.

"You were so."

"I was not."

"But I am telling you that you were."

"Then you are just a liar, John Macleod. You would think there was nobody could play the pipes but you, the way you are talking."

"There is no one here that can play them better," said John stoutly.

"Is there not? What about me, then?"

"You!" cried John, "you are nothing but a—"

A warning word from Captain Ogilvie behind interrupted the debate. The friends marched on side by side, grimly silent. The Company cleared the town and came out on the shore-road. Still these two would not speak.

"Are you lads just out for a walk!" came the Captain's ironical question.

So they had to play, and *The Green Hills of Tyrol* was their choice. They played and played. The Company passed the lighthouse at the Cloch, marched round Lunderston Bay, up the steep brae at the Kennels, and back along the slow slope of Homeston Hill. And still *The Green Hills of Tyrol* droned ahead. A Company groaned in unison, then it saw

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the joke. It split into factions. One group gave Col its rough support, the other sardonically cheered the efforts of John. They could not know that for the pipers it was an affair almost of life and death.

"Stick it, Col!" cried Deveney from the front ranks, "I've a bob wi' Johnnie Foster on them bellows of yours."

Col and John ignored the jests. They were in deadly earnest. John's puffy face was red, Col's hollow cheeks went white. Down their foreheads streamed sweat. The miles—one, two, three, four and five—passed slowly.

It was Captain Ogilvie, apprehensive of the effect of mirth on discipline, who brought the contest to an end. "That'll do," he said crisply.

The tune expired in a wail like the deflation of a toy balloon. A great cheer saluted the end of the duel.

"Jings, Col!" cried Deveney, "ye've saved ma week's rent for me."

So they returned to the billet in the gloaming. As the Company stood eager for dismissal in the courtyard, the Captain spoke with the C.S.M. He ended by pointing to Col and John.

"See that these two pipers go on the roster for ordinary duties," he said. "They can go up the hill to-night, to begin with."

Then Col and John could no longer resist the need to speak to each other. Going up the hill had a special significance for A Company.

They fell in with No. 1 Platoon at the back of six o'clock, and they were plain private soldiers again. Col and John carried equipment, pack and entrenching tools over their greatcoats. They shouldered

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the hard, unaccustomed rifles of the infantry. They were told off and numbered vigorously by an unsympathetic sergeant. A boy, the platoon commander, came out of the darkness to glance at his command and exchanged some muttered words with the sergeant. He gave his commands quietly, almost drearily. No. 1 Platoon set out on duty up the hill.

And now that section of A Company did not move crisply. It had to straggle over a rough, steep path up the hillside, and it went to perform a wearisome duty. The night was very dark, overcast and starless. From away down the Firth the siren of a destroyer yelled like a banshee. Now and again the young officer turned and addressed his men wearily.

"For God's sake, keep together and don't straggle like a lot of bally sheep."

Up the steep hill, toiling under the packs, moving listlessly to a dreary duty, Col wondered if this was to be his experience henceforth, if he was never to play again in the privileged and glorious band.

After half an hour they came out on the plateau at the top of the hill and were halted to face the dispirited party they were relieving. The voices of the two young officers sounded bleak and muffled in the darkness. A formal, empty exchange of salutes, and the old guard marched off. The corporal of Col's section became extremely busy.

"Macaulay and Macleod—first relief, No. 1 post; Mackie and Burke, second relief; Todd and Jamieson, third relief."

Col had not the slightest idea what the man intended to convey. He simply allowed these mathematical observations to pass over his head. Then he was marched off in the company of five of

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his comrades and posted with John Macleod on a rocky ledge overlooking a cliff. In a gabble, which they did not follow, they were told their duties. For the space of two hours a section of the home defence of Great Britain was left in the hands of two innocent and ignorant pipers. It is possible that they might have dealt faithfully with an invading German; certainly they would not have done so in the manner laid down by the manuals.

So the two friends found themselves alone together in the darkness. Before them lay the town, swarming over the foothills of Renfrewshire, and the flat Firth four hundred feet below. Turning south-eastwards they could see, faint in the blackness, the white stones of a cemetery. A shrill, unfriendly wind from the East swept down the River and swirled among the rocks. It was cold, bitterly cold. They slung their loaded rifles on their shoulders, thrust their numb hands deep in their pockets, and marched up and down their platform, discussing Benbecula and the old days.

They were vastly startled when after an hour a form suddenly appeared out of the darkness before them. It occurred neither to Col nor to John to handle the situation with a rifle. They were greatly surprised and slightly shocked when the voice of their young officer jetted a stream of abuse at them.

"Great Heavens Almighty! In the name of—"

Col and John stared at him innocently. The fount of the young officer's eloquence dried up. He peered at them.

"Do you two not know your jobs?" he asked peevishly.

And still they stared, mildly, deferentially.

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"Good God!" ejaculated the young officer emptily.

He turned on his heel and passed into the darkness. Col and John looked after him with large wondering eyes. Then John turned to Col.

"He is a queer wee fellow that," he said temperately.

They resumed the defence of the Empire.

They were relieved soon after that, and the corporal marched them through the darkness to where a faint shaft of light glowed in the lee of a hillock.

"Youse two is in No. 2 Blockhouse. I'll come for ye again at one o'clock."

He left them before a low door in a wall of turves. Col had to stoop low and then to step over the bodies of two sleeping men. The acrid smoke from a great brazier filled the chamber, which was lit only by the flames of that gigantic blaze. Col was reminded of mean huts on the shores of Benbecula. There was no danger of fire: the brazier stood in an inch of liquid mud.

When the friends looked for a space on which to sleep, they found that the whole floor of the blockhouse was wet and soggy. It seemed to be packed with men save where, about the brazier, the sergeant and his cronies were playing nap. A strange group they made, their tense faces glowing in the firelight, their heads adorned with balaclava helmets of khaki wool. They looked like lamas of Tibet engaged in some dark rite of fire-worship. None of the players looked up when Col and John came in. Life on the hill had none of the amenities of that warm loft at Cults Farm.

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It was that reflection which stayed with Col when at last he settled down. The friends found a strip of empty floor by the door. They had to lie down fully clothed on the mud, with their heads towards the East wind that whined through the low doorway. And Col could not sleep. The cold was bitter: soon he was stiff with it. A burst sandbag above his head dribbled fine pebbles on his face. Once or twice, something soft brushed his cheek. He realized that there were rats about. Always the group round the brazier remained intent on their game.

A queer change, indeed, for one who had been a piper in the band. But it did not occur to Col to wonder, as others might very properly have done, why fifty men should thus be holding, against far-distant Germans and in extreme discomfort, a line of trenches on a hill on the West coast of Scotland.

That night, indeed, the wise men who immediately governed the fate of Col and his kind were moved to swift but incomprehensible action. A telephone bell rang in the bedroom of an hotel down in the town, and a young officer threw back a soft quilt to clutch the receiver. A thin voice repeated to him the words of a telegram which had just reached headquarters.

"Enemy attacks in force expected on English Coast to-night," it ran. "Take necessary action."

His dressing-gown flying, the young officer ran along the corridor to the chamber of his colonel. The message was read over to that tactician. The colonel pondered, but only for a moment.

"Turn out A Company to man the trenches. Let

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C and D move up in support. B can stay in reserve. Ring Ogilvie at once. Quick!"

Thus, in anticipation of a highly improbable strategical move by potential invaders, A Company was hustled out of billet and blockhouse to stand all night in waterlogged trenches.

Col was wakened from a doze by the rough hand of the corporal on his shoulder.

"C'm on, now! Jump to it! Into the trenches with you!"

He was hustled out into the windy darkness. Blindly fumbling with the buckles of his equipment, he followed a dim figure just ahead. They moved over a rough path, slipping on the roots of whins and bruising their ankles on stones.

Suddenly the man ahead disappeared, and it dawned on Col that he must jump into the trench. He let himself fall into a blackness. Icy water splashed up his bare legs. He found himself, in defence of home, wading to his thighs in the freezing bilge of that ditch.

There he remained with his comrades for four mortal hours. The men were too miserable to talk. That cold water paralysed the lower limbs and, through the body, the brain. There was nothing to do but to lean on a sodden parapet, with numb fingers round the chill trigger-guards of the rifles. They heard nothing human save an occasional curse from a tired, exasperated man. A dead silence was on the countryside, and not even a night bird squawked above them. There were no lights to be seen. Only the white stones of the cemetery and the washed walls of a farmhouse, a mile away, gleamed ever so faintly. Through the whins and

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rushes behind the trench mourned the easterly wind.

Had the Germans come that night it is doubtful indeed if that line of shivering men could have held them. Near Col, at least, there was none in authority to tell them what to do. Col was entirely without any understanding of the reason for this chaotic move in the night. He only knew that queer things happened to a soldier. He was endlessly patient.

But the Germans did not come that night. Certainly they made no attack on the upper reaches of the Firth of Clyde. It was past four in the morning when the platoon commander passed along the parados of the trench.

"Out you come, now! You fellows on the right move along now."

Sighing patiently, the men splashed back to the end of the trench and stretched their numb legs to reach firm ground. The cold wind stung their wet knees, doubling the agony caused by wet and shrinking puttees.

"Oh, Oh, Oh, it's a lovely war!" sang a ribald and satirical voice.

"Stop that!" rapped the voice of the subaltern, and he glared at Col as if the piper possessed sufficient nimbleness of humour to have passed that comment on his superiors' intelligence.

Thinking of the brazier in the blockhouse, Col hurried on. But he did not reach the fire. At the door of the shelter he was held up by the arm of the corporal, beside whom stood John Macleod.

"There ye are, Macaulay. Wandering as usual. Come on, youse two."

They were marched off, away from the shelter

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of the blockhouse, to the sentry post where they had already passed two hours of that night. There they had to stand for another two hours. A wet kilt, drying in an easterly gale, pickles the skin above the knees. Col and John exchanged few words that watch.

As the meagre dawn was breaking they were relieved at last, and when they reached the blockhouse the fire in the brazier had died. It was dark and foul and cheerless inside; tired and unwashed men slept heavily. John Macleod lay down at once and fell asleep. But Col had brought with him in his pack his tartan slacks. He was careful to change before he stretched himself on the mud beside the inert body of his friend.

Sleep closed on him at once. And yet it seemed that he had just fallen over when the harsh voice of the sergeant filled the hut, and the sergeant's toe knocked against his ribs.

"Come on, now. Turn out, jump to it. Here's the Colonel comin'."

The platoon fell in drowsily. To a man they were filthy, begrimed with mud, unshaven, their faces gray with the smoke from the brazier. Across the grass, brisk and fresh from his bed, jaunty on his charger, rode the Colonel with his adjutant. They saw his eyes narrow and his brows come down as he stared at the weary soldiers.

He dismounted. He looked ferociously at No. 1 Platoon. Along the line passed his bulging eye. It seemed to linger on the person of Col Macaulay.

"Mr. Campbell," he called sharply to the subaltern. Then he pointed his riding crop at Col. "Why is that man not in the kilt?"

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The young officer mumbled an explanation.

"That's all blasted rot!" said the Colonel.

"No excuse. A little water. Poul!"

He stepped up to Col, glaring.

"Look here, my man! This is a Highland regiment—not the Boys' Brigade. I suppose you wear pyjamas at night?"

Col did not. He had never heard of pyjamas. It was the Colonel who wore pyjamas at night. Col heard him instruct the subaltern as he turned, disgusted, to his horse.

"See that that man is properly punished."

CHAPTER V

THE lane that led from the main road into the courtyard of Cults Farm was straight and not more than a hundred yards in length, but it was dark at night. It ran between the gardens of two large houses that faced the street and about three feet below the level of these enclosures. Above the supporting walls of the garden there grew thick hedges of thorn the height of a man ; so that when the sun was set the lane became a tunnel, lit only by a pale gas-lamp at the entrance. More for the sake of formality than in strict defensive intention, A Company kept a sentry pacing under the sickly radiance of the incandescent flame.

In the purely police sense, the precaution was necessary. Adventurous ladies were prone to approach through the lane the virtue of the troops within the farm buildings. Soldiers of the militia, in hutments on the other side of the road, frequently sought the shade of the hedges for the confidential conduct of their amours. It was suspected that enterprising sentries had more than once levied a private but profitable tariff on traffic of the kind.

Through the lane, then, and past the sentry went all the business of A Company at night. When the band was broken up and he became a private soldier once again, Col Macaulay came to enjoy his spells of duty at the mouth of the lane. It was a soft

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job compared with the ardours of the blockhouses on the hill. Even Col became vividly interested in the stir of the main road outside.

At many strange happenings did he wink an official eye. The painted ladies and the amorous militiamen could not prevail against his simplicity, but he had his part in the dark, domestic moments of A Company's life. He saw his young officers, the worse for drink, shouldered home by mysterious friends. He fell often to the blandishments of Deveney, feverish to run without leave for a drink in the Bungalow down the road. He saw his company commander return in a taxicab at the dawn from a night-out in Glasgow. He aided and abetted Harry Barley, caught by an officer in conversation with a woman of the streets, to slip out of barracks at midnight so that he might hurry home and, before she should hear the gossip of the camp, establish an alibi with his wife in Cartsyke. Better three days C.B. than a matrimonial upheaval. And it was while on sentry-go that Col encountered Kirsty Galbraith.

It was after eleven one quiet night of drizzle. The road was empty, the last noises of song and strife in the militia hutments had died away. All the lights of the River were hazed by mist, and the overweening hill behind had withdrawn under the clouds. Col was glad of the green light of the gas-lamp. It cheered him to hear occasionally the beat of footsteps on the pavements and the muffled ringing of bells on ships at anchor.

Suddenly he started from a reverie. A gate had opened in the lane behind him, the side-gate of the great house that hemmed in Cults Farm on the North. He looked round to see a girl pass behind him.

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She wore a coat of brown frieze and the cap of a maidservant. In her hand was a letter.

With interest Col watched the tall and sturdy figure run across the road to the pillar-box. Sauntering again, the girl returned towards the house. Col could see that her eyes, sly and adventurous, were upon him. She spoke in a tentative, alluring whisper.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo!" answered Col, smiling pleasantly.

That exchange of syllables revealed to each a special quality of intonation in the other's speech. They peered at each other.

"*Bheil Gaidhlig agad?*" asked Col intensely.

"*Tha, pailleas,*" replied the girl.

There it was. She had the Gaelic. She was of those who are drawn from the Isles by the vague pull of the prosperous Lowlands. The fact at once gave their acquaintance a stability and a privilege it could not have had if the girl had spoken in the cocky tones of Clydeside. To the blandishments of a town girl Col would never have responded. Now he looked with affectionate interest into the face of his countrywoman.

It was such a face as he had seen on a hundred island girls. It was broad, heavy, and in complexion muddy, like the typical Slav countenance. The hair was dark, and the eyebrows were heavy over eyes of a smutty grey. The expression was of slowness and stolidity. It was a face without beauty, yet it fascinated Col by its homeliness. Unconsciously he appreciated, too, the height and sturdiness of this Highland girl.

They exchanged names. They discovered that,

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while he was of Benbecula, she was of Harris. She had a brother in the Camerons and another in the Edinburgh Police. She said that she had often admired Col as he marched out playing in the band. He glowed with pleasure.

The conversation lagged after a time. But still the girl hung about the gate.

"You will have plenty of nights off?" she observed at large. Then, when Col had agreed, "I am having to-morrow off myself."

"Indeed," said Col politely.

The girl hesitated, her eyes reproachful of his simplicity.

"I don't know what I'll do with myself, I'm sure," she went on and sighed.

It was then that Col accepted her challenge.

"Would you be thinking of a wee walk round the hill?" he asked.

"With you?" as if surprised.

"Aye. With me." He cracked a joke. "What's wrong with me?"

"All right," she agreed. Then: "Oh, there's the mistress at the window! Seven o'clock . . ."

Col was left with some very gratifying thoughts.

It troubled him next day to realise that he had now a secret which he could not share with John Macleod. He could not even make his tryst with Kirsty the subject of a jest, so gravely did he regard the assignation. He felt a little mean, and he saw that John was vividly aware of his abstraction.

A Company marched out that day, and the two pipers played lustily at the head of the column, but their talks between the tunes lacked the old

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frankness. John had started by proposing that they should practise that evening a pibroch of considerable difficulty ; he had enlarged on its classical beauties, and Col's uncomfortable, evasive replies, his failure to respond enthusiastically, had put John in a suspicious huff.

"Have you a pain in your stomach ? " he asked, and when Col had denied the impeachment, " Well, you are terrible dour. I don't know what's come over you at all."

So they were cool with each other all day. After tea at night, with a sardonic look on his face, John watched silently while Col prepared himself to go out. It was crisis between these two, a threat to friendship. But John did not speak until Deveney, passing their corner of the loft, threw his joke at Col.

"Haw, Loonie. Are ye poshin' yersel' up for a mull ? "

The friends were left with that awkward suspicion hanging between them. At last Col rose and put on his greatcoat, tilted his glengarry to the proper angle, and grasped his swagger-cane. Then John spoke sternly.

"Is it some girl you are after ? " he asked.

"What if it is ? " retorted Col peevishly.

John picked up his chanter and looked at it carefully.

"Well, well ! You are the fool, Col Macaulay," he said.

But Kirsty was there at the end of the lane, heavily arch in her talk of his lateness. It delighted him, this gaiety, and at the back of his mind he began to think contemptuously of John. This was a fine girl, surely, a grand strapping woman.

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She wore the brown coat in which he had seen her the night before. Over her untidy lump of lank hair flopped a large black hat, trimmed ebulliently with blue roses. She walked on shoes of which the high heels were uneven and tilted. Her stockings gathered in rings about her ankles. Between the lapels of her coat gleamed the rose-pink sateen of her blouse, fastened close round the neck by a large brooch. She carried an umbrella, the perfect lady. Col was vastly flattered by the companionship of this fine woman. He thought her very beautiful indeed.

Their talk was merry. It suited Kirsty to pretend a belief that all soldiers were promiscuously gallant, and when Col protested, she pushed at his shoulder with a large, coy hand. Almost she persuaded him that he was a breaker of hearts, and he certainly felt the necessity of living up to that reputation.

They reached the corner round which the road turned up the hill. Here Col bore naturally to the left, but she pulled at his arm and paused.

"Ugh!" she ejaculated, her heavy lower lip sagging. "Not up there."

So they kept to the lower road. It did not occur to Col to question her whimsy. He was happy just to be with her. They followed the gleaming tram-rails for a time and then the deserted esplanade round the bay. But Kirsty's conversation and presence were so exciting that Col, for one, did not notice nor care where they went. He was the easiest victim a hungry woman could have found, and she clung desperately to her conquest.

They came at length to the heart of the western township. The open space at the pier-head was

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deserted, and they could hear the forlorn wash of waves against the sea-wall below. Only one fat sergeant of police made a comfortable feature on the wilderness of concrete, cobbles, and stone. The lights of a picture-house on the north side of the square made a futile appeal to an absent populace.

It was these lights and the harsh posters beneath them that caught the dark, roving eye of Kirsty.

"Come on and see the pictures!" she cried to Col.

He jumped to the suggestion. It was for him a fine adventure to be taking a girl to the pictures. In his zeal he dived into a dim little shop and bought her a poke of caramels.

They found that only one row of the cheap seats was occupied, and that but sparsely, so they took their places triumphantly under the screen. Very carefully Kirsty took off her hat and so disposed herself that her hair brushed Col's cheek. His heart pounded at that, and he drew in the invincible smell of verbena that scented soap, richly applied, had left on her cheeks. He found also that her foot was pressed up against his.

Kirsty, however, did not neglect the screen. A raging melodrama was being played out there. There came a crisis in the play when the hero, enraged by the temptation put before him by a wicked woman, took the lady by the throat and shook her violently.

Kirsty's elbow was thrust into Col's ribs.

"My, but it is awful good," she said breathlessly.

Col, indifferent to the drama, watched Kirsty's rapt face. She was chewing a caramel noisily. When the photoplay reached its tenser moments, the chewing stopped and her mouth remained

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open in wonder and suspense. A relaxation of the tension, and the champing went on more energetically than ever. And when the play slowed down to its thickly sentimental end, Kirsty let her emotions run with those of hero and heroine. Col felt his arm lifted and put about her neck. He was completely happy.

Arm-in-arm they walked home through a drizzle of rain, and they were so lost in their trance that they were but a hundred yards from the lane when Kirsty remembered that her fine hat should have had protection from the umbrella. The sentry let them pass with a wink. The dark of the lane was gratifying. Col found his arm about Kirsty's waist, and her waist was soft. But when, impelled by a rush of hot emotion, he leaned forward to kiss her, she squealed coquettishly, wriggled from his arms and fled. He did not despair, however, for they had arranged to meet soon again.

Col was to find that his attachment to Kirsty could not pass unnoticed by the wits of A Company. The sentry, coming off duty that night, brought the tale into the billet—that Col, old Loonie, the sheepish piper, was after the big lassie in "Glengower." The girl was known to every man in Cults Farm; marching out, they had often laughed at her face staring hungrily over the hedge. She was not desirable according to the smart Clydeside standards of the men; too lumpish and slow for them. That she had wound a spell about the simple heart of big Col seemed to them very funny.

The chaff was led by Deveney.

"Haw, Loonie! How's the moll? Are ye gettin' merriit soon?"

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And when Col sought the comparative peace of Harry Barley's shed, the cook spoke to him pessimistically of marriage and its vicissitudes.

"You watch yoursel', ma lad," was the burden of his advice. "They're funny folk the weemen, mind I'm tellin' ye."

The banter and the warnings served only to bring a good-humoured grin to the face of Col. He would blush a little and reproach them gently.

"Och, you and your fun!"

But it was different with John Macleod. John had been his friend, and now John was hostile. He kept silence in the presence of Col. When Col spoke to him, John answered only in monosyllables, often with no more than a grunt. And that was painful. In his joy in the affections of Kirsty, Col wished everybody to be happy and content. The observant among their comrades noticed the estrangement and cracked appropriate jokes.

Still, they had to play together when the Company went out on the march. They had, at least once a week, to share the bleak vigil of the hilltops. They were left to sleep together in that corner of the loft which was sacrosanct to the pipers. And John, his round, red face set in grim and outraged determination, would not resume the old relations so long as Col was thirled to the service of Kirsty Galbraith.

The result was only to send Col the more often to the comfort of the girl's company. As often as her nights out accorded with his freedom from duty, they walked the streets together. Kirsty would not be persuaded towards the country roads—her covetousness kept her to the pavements of the town—and Col's pay did not run to frequent picture-house

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entertainments. So they paraded aimlessly, now the esplanade, then the mean and crowded main street, and again past the pillar-boxes and red sandstone churches of the suburban boulevards. It was enough for her to have him in her power ; it was enough for him thus to have her favour.

As intimacy grew they devised subtler means of meeting. When he was on sentry-go at the mouth of the lane she giggled and whispered through the hedge. Other evenings, when neither he nor she had liberty to be out, Col would steal round the western gables of the farm-buildings, climb to the parapet of the garden wall and converse with her while she stood giggling among her employer's brussels sprouts.

What they talked about does not bear recording. If there were deeps of spirit in Col, he could not express them in words, and Kirsty lacked utterly the capacity to take in anything that was not material. The advances were all hers. She giggled ; she was heavily arch ; she invited caresses, joked about caresses, then pretended to be surprised when they were offered her. Crudely and desperately she played the old sexual game. Fate had sent her a decent simpleton for her opponent.

Every night, alone in the loft, John Macleod played melancholy tunes on the chanter.

So the weeks passed. Christmas came and caused no flutter among those Scotsmen, who were preparing sternly for the proper celebration of Hogmanay. This New Year's Eve was to be memorable. Rich souls like Deveney solemnly forecasted the degree of drunkenness they would reach that night. But the carousal was to be decently conducted. For the

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honour of the Company, the men had consented to confine the orgy within the billet. There was to be a supper, with beer, at the expense of Captain Ogilvie. There was to be a concert, arranged by the subalterns. Unanimous, A Company prepared for the celebration in the proper spirit of corporate enthusiasm.

The last day of the old year dawned at length. A Company were not asked to turn out in the grey of the morning. The sentry paced the mouth of the lane as usual, and in the frosty sunlight of afternoon No. 3 Platoon, disconsolate, fell in for duty on the hill. But for the rest it was a day of spit and polish, of scrubbing and cooking. Harry Barley sweated copiously in his shed, preparing a miraculous meal. Under energetic lance-corporals sections scrubbed the planks of the loft and swabbed the concrete floors of the mess-room below. Gentler souls plundered the farm-garden for laurel branches to hang upon the rafters. From the outhouse came the plangent blasts of an amateur trombonist, practising festive airs.

Col and John were put together to the scrubbing of tables. All afternoon they worked with their pails and brushes and did not exchange one word. For all the cheerfulness of bustle about them, for all the cordiality of the occasion, they could not break down the wall of sullen misunderstanding that had been raised between them by Kirsty Galbraith. Col actually refused to drink after John from a bottle of whisky that Deveney had smuggled into the loft. For these two the refusal was significant, fatal.

At last the time came for A Company to prepare for the festivities. The loft filled with noisy young

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men, fighting for space in which to change from fatigue dress into the green kilt and khaki tunic of formality. There were borrowing of soap and combs, curses at guttering candles, squabbles for standing-room before tiny mirrors. Men ran half-dressed across the courtyard to beg hot water from Harry Barley. Again and again the voices of sergeants appealed from below for "Less noise, there! Less noise!" The appeals were in vain.

Col and John were late on this scene of riot, for a painstaking and loyal corporal had put them to the scrubbing of those chairs on which the officers were to sit at the concert. The loft was nearly empty when they had finished dressing in their corner. Over that silent process of changing both of them lingered. It was as if they were watching each other, as if they knew that this quarrel between them must be resolved one way or another on the night of Hogmanay.

It was John who was ready first. Col wasted time over the winding of his puttees. But John would not move away; he stood there, his red face stolid, watching with sullen eyes the doings of his friend. That vigilant gaze irritated Col.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked pettishly.

"I'm waiting for you to come down to the mess-room," returned John.

"Well, you can just wait," said Col.

And John waited, faithful to the end. Col felt the anger rising within him and the heat of blood in his cheeks.

"Will you go away and leave me!" he cried.

"I will not," said John.

"Ach, you"

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Col jumped to his feet and, with a flourish of challenge in the gesture, reached for his greatcoat.

"Are you going out?" asked the steady, hostile voice of John.

It was the inevitable challenge. John was putting his friend to the last test of loyalty to A Company, to himself, to the whole spirit of comradeship.

In silence Col buttoned up his greatcoat, put on his bonnet, and picked up his swagger-cane.

"Is it that Kirsty Galbraith?" asked John inexorably.

"What if it is?"

They faced each other squarely, their eyes meeting in a contest of wills.

"It is just this," said John. "She is nothing but a bitch. She is a right bad woman, and any man in the billet will tell you so. And you are nothing but a fool, a fool, a fool."

Col stared while John maligned the character of Kirsty Galbraith. Then, as his slow mind took in the meaning of these black words, the passion of resentment shot like lightning through every nerve of his body. He rushed at the red, hateful face of John Macleod . . . But he did not reach it. Something heavy hit him on the shoulder. He tripped and fell. A strong body pounced on his back and held him down.

"Haw, Loonie! It's Hogmanay . . ."

It was Deveney who had thrown the pack, and now he appealed to the spirit of goodwill. But Col fought fiercely for freedom.

"Get oot o' here, quick," cried Deveney to John. "This block's like to murder ye. Scoot!"

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John disappeared down the wooden ladder, and Deveney took himself from off Col's back.

"There ye are, Loonie," he said angrily. "Get to blazes oot o' here if ye can't behave yersel' on Hogmanay."

Col did not deign to reply. He flung away and rattled down the ladder. They saw him pass through the door into the dark courtyard, two light red spots of anger on his cheeks. He went determined to achieve that night something that would outrageously offend John Macleod.

And John, angry and sore at heart, found his only consolation that night in drink. It was but hazily that he recognised Col when, after midnight, his friend undressed and lay down beside him. With a curiously detached interest, he watched Col pull up the brown blankets to his chin and reach out moistened fingers to snuff the candle. Col's voice came to him as from a distance.

"If you want to know," it said vindictively, "Kirsty Galbraith and I are going to get married."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN in time of war four thousand soldiers descend upon an industrial seaport and make of it a garrison town, the moral tone of the community is apt to slacken. Women are susceptible to the sight of strong young men in the mass. They tremble and flush and dream at the spectacle of battalions marching. Almost irresistible is that call of the primordial, and the General Post of war, taking their men away from women, bringing strange men in their places, releases the devil of promiscuity that in smoother times is imprisoned by the forces of social convention.

For the men of A Company, in billets at Cults Farm, the licence of the period was qualified by the fact that they were still at home. The married men among them must yet be responsible to vigilant wives; the bachelors had the sweethearts of peace to meet at nights. But in the minds of most men in that excellent Company there lurked the demon of uneasiness. The time would come when even the Territorials would be called overseas. Then the wives and sweethearts would have to be left to the tender mercies of the militia and the second-line battalion. And even in the five months since mobilisation, the strange militiamen had established themselves as a gigantic factor in the emotional life of the town.

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Members of A Company had already been involved in jealousies and duels. Had not Maclaurin of No. 3 Platoon reached home one night to find his wife in the arms of a Royal Scots Fusilier ? There was an entry in his conduct-sheet to prove the fact that he had grievously assaulted the Fusilier in defence of the sanctity of his home. More than one lad had sworn murder against Fusilier or Rifleman for the theft of some shop-girl's light affections. Even the officers . . . Camp gossip made free with the names of Captain Ogilvie's wife and a Colonel of the Garrison Artillery.

It was all part of the excitement of the time, almost of its fun, but virtuous women were uneasy, and uxorious men suffered secret qualms. It was not only an orgy of killing that had been loosed upon the world.

At first, A Company declined to take seriously the news of Col's betrothal to Kirsty Galbraith. One could not take Col quite seriously in that connection. He was not of the world ; he had about him a vagueness, an incapacity for grasping facts, that seemed to divorce him utterly from the realities of sex and domesticity. And Kirsty Galbraith was ludicrously notorious. Every man in the Company had laughed at her broad invitations. They knew so well that an advance against Kirsty's virtue would assuredly result in conquest, not one but would have been ashamed to embark on an undertaking so lacking in the proper hazards of the chase. Col and Kirsty were the subjects of a standing joke.

But though they laughed at him, though he knew that they would recognise no substance in the match, Col persisted in his wooing. It had broken down his

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friendship with John ; it had made him the butt of his comrades, but Col was faithful to his Kirsty. If his love-making was a little in defiance of A Company, it was also in sheer devotion to Kirsty. She had all of him. He did not criticise her. Even her clumsy silliness he accepted rapturously as a splendid proof of her kindness. She was there, his sweetheart, a woman, and he had all his devotion to give her.

It was Harry Barley who roused A Company to a corporate sense of its duty towards the strayed sheep. It was to Harry that Col went instinctively for solace ; in the overheated cookhouse he could let his sentiment luxuriate freely. Harry Barley did not laugh—for him matrimony was a grave business. He was fond of Col.

To Harry, then, Col spoke naturally of his girl and of his plans to marry her. At first, the cook had not listened to these vague schemes. Then Col, unconsciously moved by the urgency of Kirsty, took to calculating the rates of separation allowances. He discussed the possible movements of the battalion. One day he told Harry that he thought of getting married at the end of March.

Deveney was called into the cookshop that night, and Harry explained the problem.

"Ach, yer bunnet!" said Deveney incredulously, "I don't believe it."

"Oh, but it's right enough," Harry insisted. "Look you here, Deveney. That lassie's daft to get her hands on him, and the big saftie'll do whit she tells him. I know whit I'm talkin' about. She's a bad big besom, yon. One o' the cooks in the Fusilers tell't me a dashed funny story aboot her. Seems she knocked aboot at first wi' a corporal in the

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Cameronians, an' she was seen comin' oot his hut one night . . . Jings, ye never know."

Harry Barley looked with meaning at Deveney, and Deveney stared back.

"Gees O!" he said at length.

For a long time neither spoke. These two men of experience sat gazing into the boiler fire. It was Deveney who broke the silence.

"I tell ye whit," he said. "I'll take Col and his girl doon to see the wife. Mebbe she'll knock some sense into him."

It was as if he gave up a problem too difficult for a man's mind and passed it over to the subtler intuitions of the female.

It was not difficult to arrange the meeting. Col was always grateful for kindness, and Kirsty felt the need of female sympathy, now that the prospect of marriage had become more than a dream. One evening the three of them caught a tramcar at the foot of the road and were whirled out past the sugar-houses and the docks to the tenements of Inch-green.

The home of the Deveneys was a very decent room-and-kitchen house on the fourth floor of a great crescental block of cheaply-built, modern dwellings. The kitchen, which they entered off a balcony, was bright with polished lids, grocers' calendars and shining crockery. There was clean linoleum on the floor; the wooden dresser was scrubbed white. A tidy washing of infants' garments hung from a pulley near the ceiling. The gleaming steel fender took the glow of a brisk coal fire and rested on a hearthstone that had been pipe-clayed to the whiteness of paper. There was a cat on the

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rush-mat before this splendid fireplace and, on the hob, a comfortable brown teapot.

It was the kitchen of a house-proud woman, not at all the sort of home readily associated with the rough, easy-going Deveney. In that brisk atmosphere, indeed, Deveney's humour lost much of its gusto. He had married character. His Bella stood up before Col as a small woman with steady eyes and purposeful lips. Her hair was flat and dressed close to her skull. The sleeves of her white blouse were rolled up to her elbows, and they were sturdy forearms that were thus exposed. Kindly but calmly she bade them welcome. Those grey eyes of hers comprehended Kirsty at a glance—the loud sloppy clothes, the draggled hair, the dirty neck, the worn shoes, and the stupid soul of Kirsty. Bella dominated the group.

They sat down to tea. It was a good tea. Bella Deveney had baked that afternoon. Good bread and margarine there were; cheese, scones and even a jam-roll. All ate heartily, especially Deveney, who drank seven cups of tea and was frequently cautioned by Bella for speaking with his mouth full.

Yet there was something wrong. Col, ever uncritical, was completely happy beside his beloved at that hospitable table. But Deveney, who knew his wife, was acutely aware of tension in the atmosphere. Bella had not surrendered herself to the charm of her guests. The broader the jests of Deveney, the flatter they fell. As the meal progressed, the nervous chatter of Kirsty Galbraith became almost hysterical. She knew herself to be under critical eyes; she knew, as Deveney knew, that the personal issue now was between woman and

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woman. She did not improve matters by forgetting, when the meal was over, to offer help to Bella in the washing of the dishes.

When the table was clear again, the conversation round the fire was hardly successful. In the Windsor chair sat Bella, neat and prim, her eyes steady on Kirsty. On the other side of the hearth sat Col, his light blue eyes rapt in open adoration of his betrothed, who, flushed and foolish, gabbled nonsense in response to the febrile jocularity of their host. Not all the pleading of Deveney's eyes could melt the reserve of Bella. At length, almost desperately, he jumped to his feet and produced a melodeon from the dresser-cupboard.

By music, most useful of social lubricants, a crisis was averted. Kirsty would surely have screamed under the persistent torture of Bella's steady eyes. But Deveney played manfully—jigs and old ballads of Scotland and sticky waltz tunes of the halls—till something like cordiality enveloped the group. Actually Bella sang to them; she had her notions of the duties of a hostess. "The Lea Rig," it was, and she reproduced every trick of the florid sopranos she had heard at Saturday Afternoon Recitals in the Town Hall. Her style was much admired.

"Crivvens, Bella!" swore Deveney. "Ye've a voice like a flakin' nightingale."

And Bella blushed. Then Kirsty sang—not an old sad song of Gaeldom, but a tawdry whine of vaudeville, and she sang it through her nose.

"Isn't she just splendid!" asked Col, doting, of his hostess.

"Imphm," was Bella's dry response.

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They tired of music, and then Deveney realized that his wife was anxious for their guests to be gone. He assumed his joviality.

"Here, youse two! Mebbe ye'd like to walk back to the billet. I'm waitin' here wi' the wife."

Kirsty was quick to seize the chance of escape. She dragged Col from his simple enjoyment of the evening and hurried him out into the night. Deveney turned to face his wife.

"I suppose ye know," she said, "that that lassie is goin' to have a bairn."

Deveney stared at her, then sought refuge in a jest.

"Ye needna' blame me for that," he remarked.

"I'm no' blamin' ye," retorted Bella, as one sure of her authority. "But I'm blamin' ye for lettin' that big trollop make a cod of a decent lad. Ye should think shame o' yersel', Joe Deveney. Away you back to the billet an' get that boy oot the hands o' yon baggage. An' don't you dare to show yer face here again till ye've done it."

Late that evening Deveney sought out Harry Barley in the gloom of the cookshop.

"God love me, Harry," he said, "but weemen are queer folk."

"I'm no needin' you to tell me that," answered Harry morosely.

There they sat together for a time, the ruddy glow of the fire on their plain, strong faces, two British working-men. They had jested about marriage often and crudely. Their attitude to women was always that of a privileged, superior caste. And at the end of it all they were baffled by the ineluctable and universal fact that women, queer folk as they may be, are tremendously significant in the life of a

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man. Even Col the meek, even old Loonie could not escape that dark influence. It made them think.

Their reverie was interrupted by the falling of a shadow athwart the faint sheen of starlight that outlined the shape of the door behind them. They turned to see the Company Sergeant-Major enter.

"Well, boys," he said quietly as he advanced to the fire.

They saw that his genial face was grave. He held out a slippered foot to the warmth of the coal, and the glow of the fire was reflected in downcast, thoughtful eyes.

"There's news for ye, boys," he said at length. "I've just come from a talk with the Captain."

Again the good man paused. He had a family of six. He turned to gaze a little wistfully into the courtyard.

"We're moving from here soon," he went on.

"Moving?"

"Aye—moving. Somewhere in Fife, I'm told. For training. It'll not be long before we're for the Front."

The two men stared at him. Then, moved simultaneously by an obscure emotion, they turned to each other and solemnly shook hands.

"By God, that's great news!" swore Harry Barley fervently.

For these two, somehow, the news was good. They were younger men than the C.S.M. They longed to get away. Just to fight? Or to escape—from the queerness of women and the toils of domesticity?

"Ah, boys, but you're young yet," said the C.S.M. and left them. Deveney rose to follow.

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"I'll away an' tell the boys. Wait till you hear them—"

And Harry Barley duly heard the cheers that rang through the stillness of a frosty night—the glad, tragic cheers of young soldiers.

"It'll be the devil's own business when the wife hears this," muttered Harry Barley morosely as he raked out his fire for the night.

A Company gave itself over to the excitements of anticipation. They were going—away from home, to train, and then to knock hell out of the Germans. It was as simple as that for the Territorial Army in February, 1915. They would learn old Jerry . . . But, mainly they were agog to be away, away—anywhere, save where they happened to be. They were much like school-children planning the holidays.

Rumour had a brisk innings. The battalion was to move in a week, in three days' time, to-morrow. They were to move straight to France—they who had never so much as heard of a jam-tin bomb. They were to proceed to Ireland; they were to garrison the lone Bermudas. Or India, Egypt, Hong-Kong. The mere prospect of travel, let alone the fighting, was exhilarating. A Company looked forward to a holiday. Even Col Macaulay went about with a flush on his cheeks, his eyes sanguine.

"Do you think they will be needing the band again?" he would ask eagerly of sergeant and newly joined recruit.

It was easy for Deveney to forget in these excitements the love-affairs of Col. This was a situation in which women could be forgotten. They were going to get away from all that. It was only when

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he broke the news to his wife that Deveney was reminded of Col and Kirsty.

Bella Deveney bore up stoutly against the personal shock. The hard pride of her race would not permit her a tear. Her lips twitched a little. Then :

" I suppose ye'll have to go," she said.

Quickly she turned to the fire and poked it vigorously. She looked up at length, her taut self again.

" Well, ye'll get that lad Col away from yon besom, anyway."

Deveney was late in returning to the billet that night. As he hastened up the street from the tram-car, he saw that the sentry on duty was a tall man, and that he was speaking to somebody hidden in the darkness of the hedge. Col Macaulay and his Kirsty. As Deveney approached, there was a rustle behind the hedge and a scatter of gravel ; Col turned to resume his watch.

" Hullo, Loonie," said Deveney quietly and made to pass. He was stopped by a husky, intense whisper from Col.

" Here, Joe ! Here—I want to speak to you."

" I'm late, Loonie—"

" No, but here. Listen now, Joe. Me and Kirsty are going to get married before the battalion goes away."

" Haw, Loonie ! " protested Deveney.

" Yes, yes. I'm telling you." Col's voice was eager. " Will you give me a hand to get things ready ? "

" O Gor . . . " The situation was for the moment beyond Deveney. He shook himself free. " Give a fella a chance, Loonie. We'll see, we'll see . . . "

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He hurried off up the lane. Next evening he hastened back to Inchgreen to lay the difficult question before his wife.

In the end it was Bella who took charge of the problem. She disapproved, but she was of the kind that is stirred by an emergency to a fierce, active impatience with the stupidity of her fellow-creatures. If that fool would get married to that trollop, she seemed to say, then let the thing be done properly.

"Away you back to the farm," she dismissed her husband, when he had stumbled through his account of the dilemma, "an' leave this to folks that's got their heids screwed on right."

Bella rose to her occasion. She had a brief, vigorous interview with Kirsty, then hurried that young woman into a drapery store and had Kirsty's outfit and blankets bought within half an hour. She it was who bullied a factor's clerk into letting a single room in an ancient property in Cartdyke. Bella arranged the details of the ceremony. Had she not done all these things, it is hard to say who would have done them.

Her husband dared to cross her only once. Bella's idea was that Kirsty and Col would be decently married in her house by a minister of the Church of Scotland. Already she had spoken to the Reverend Mr. Sime, who conducted the St. Andrew's Mission in Ratho Street. Then Deveney pointed out the legal difficulties. With the battalion ready to move at an hour's notice, there could be no proclamation of banns, no formal warning to the public. He saw an indignant flush come to Bella's cheeks and the tightening of her lips.

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"If these two fools are to get merrit, they'll get merrit proper," she said firmly. "It'll be Mr. Sime or naebody."

Deveney could afford to laugh at her foolish feminine defiance of established custom.

"Man, but ye're a dour wee thing!" he cried affectionately.

"Nane o' yer butter, Joe Deveney!" she warned him, "nane o' yer butter!"

But it had to be as Deveney said. Even Bella had to bow to the Law.

"It's no' decent," was her last word, "an' ye'll no' get me in nae Register Office. Nor in the Sheriff's Court neither. I'll stay at hame and get the dinner ready."

But she performed yet another good service for Col Macaulay. She had her husband bring John Macleod to her house one night and insisted in his red and stubborn face that he must support his friend on his wedding day.

"Oh, I suppose you will have your way of it," said John at length, peevishly.

"I'll have nae scandal in this house," said Bella stoutly.

So it was by Deveney and John Macleod that Col and Kirsty were hurried through the formalities of their obscure marriage. They shepherded the giggling Kirsty and the sheepish Col up dingy stairs to the bare, dark room in which the seedy Registrar asked perfunctory questions, mumbled through the service and wrote out a certificate in flawless copperplate. Then they marched them to the Sheriff Court and handed them over to the Sheriff Clerk Depute. Yes, the Sheriff was still sitting

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after the Small Debt Court. He would take them in a minute.

They stood in a corridor for a time, and Deveney cracked hollow, desperate jokes. Kirsty giggled, blushed, and shook the purple plumes on her hat. The other two were silent.

A door opened. A man beckoned with his finger. The sheepish procession of four passed across the Court. As if disturbed in a more important task, the Sheriff glanced up from his writing and frowned.

"Decree," he said and turned back to the pad before him. Col and Kirsty were man and wife.

It was a blither party that came out into the light of the street again and made for the tram-lines. As they stood waiting for a car, it occurred to John Macleod to make a demonstration. Suddenly he gripped Col Macaulay by the hand and shook it solemnly.

The bright face of Bella welcomed them at the door of her house. They saw firelight gleaming honestly on the polished lids and crockery of that fresh interior. The kitchen table was covered with a fresh blue cloth and heavy with food. As the party entered laughing, Harry Barley and his wife rose to greet them. Handshaking all round. Col was clapped on the back. But neither of the married women kissed the slack mouth of Kirsty Galbraith.

It was a solid meal that Bella Deveney had prepared for her guests. There was a great ham, newly-boiled, soft and fragrant, with innumerable potatoes. There was a plum-pudding of heroic size and richness. There were bananas, apples, oranges and nuts. The great brown teapot sweltered on the hob throughout the meal. Then Harry

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Barley, with the self-satisfied air of the conjurer, produced a bottle of whisky. Bella frowned.

"Ach, to blazes, Bella," cried her husband. "It's no' every day old Loonie gets merriit !"

He went to the khaki greatcoat hanging behind the door and, as deftly as Harry Barley with his whisky, brought out from various pockets six large bottles of beer.

They drank, all save Bella and Susie Barley. These matrons found solace in innumerable cups of dark brown tea till it became a marvel that the human body could successfully retain so great a quantity of liquid. As for Kirsty, almost hysterical now, she started with a glass of beer, then hiccupped and giggled over a cup half-full of whisky.

It was an ugly scene on which the matrons were left to frown from the isolation of sobriety. The men drank deep and confusedly. As the afternoon wore on, what was buried beneath the exterior of each came to the surface. John Macleod, his face very red, his eyes fierce, was seeking to pick a quarrel with Harry Barley. Oddly isolated on an infant's stool in a corner by the fire, Col Macaulay gaped at the ceiling with wet, blue eyes. Harry Barley roared songs to the confused and blottesque airs Deveney was churning from his melodeon. In the middle of the floor, her skirts picked up to her knees, her stockings sagging, Kirsty Galbraith danced inanely.

But Bella Deveney and Susie Barley, sober as judges, said not a word in reproof. They had seen this sort of thing before. They reckoned naturally to see it again. They waited.

They waited till John Macleod had fallen asleep

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across the table. Harry Barley and Deveney, as darkness fell, rose unsteadily, rubbed their eyes, and declared that they must return to the billet. Asprawl on the floor, her face in Col's lap, Kirsty Galbraith laughed and cried. She had been extremely, actively sick.

Such was the wedding feast. That night, A Company sent out patrols to warn the men on leave that the battalion would move at midnight to a destination unknown.

CHAPTER VII

LIKE domestic animals of the gentler sort, the two hundred odd men of A Company were shepherded at midnight by officers and sergeants into twenty-eight compartments of a train that waited for them at the suburban station.

They went from home without any of the formal splendours of farewell. Occupants of villas in that part of the town stirred in their sleep as a distant chorus rose to break the silence of the night.

Here we are! Here we are! Here we are again!

"Another draft," muttered the sleepy ones. They were used to the noisy departure of militia reinforcements from that station. The engine tooted frivolously. A Company was off on its travels. The train stopped for five minutes at the Central Station up the line, and B Company was duly packed into the rear portion. Again the whistle tooted its contralto note. The train puffed away into the night.

The men did not ask whither they were being taken thus. Perhaps that was a sign of their proper faith in those who led them. Once the train was clear of their native town, straggling along the foothills of Renfrewshire, the men of A and B Companies settled down to sleep. They were going somewhere. Where they were going they would discover in the morning. The obvious thing to do in the meantime was to sleep.

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In the corner of one of the swaying compartments reclined the lanky form of Col Macaulay. Against his arm lay the bullet head of John Macleod, his friend again. They snored in harmony while the train swung and rattled on its mysterious course along the railways of central Scotland. Like trustful children they slept while the enigmatic gods of military necessity hurled them about the country like so many bales of merchandise. Sometimes they stirred as the train thundered across the viaduct above some dark and lonely stream. Sometimes the clattering echo of the train's rush through a village station caused them to blink and shift position. But no burning curiosity as to their destination kept them for any length of time awake.

Col stirred only when the pace of the train slackened and he felt the jarring of brakes beneath him. It was still dark, the dreary hour before dawn, but he saw through one window the sheen of water. Through the other he could see the clustered lights of a town. He thought for a moment that the train had made a circular tour and returned to where they had entrained the night before. But across the water lay no such grandiose hills as they had in the West. A long bridge spanned this foreign estuary. The town did not rise to heights on a steep escarpment. Col wakened John so that he might see the place in which their lot was to be cast henceforth. Soon the whole carriage was awake, and Deveney, adventurous, had opened the window.

"God love us!" he said critically, "it's a hell of a lookin' place, this."

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The train jolted to a stop. There came to them the voices of their young officers, ringing among the stark girders of a large and empty station.

"Out you get! Fall in A Company! On with your equipment! Fall in!"

They gathered in obedient ranks under melancholy lamps whose radiance was lost in the vault of the great roof. Rapidly they numbered, sloped arms, formed fours, and marched out of the echoing station into a dark, empty street. Thus they marched, through featureless, cobbled thoroughfares, for half an hour. In the grey of dawn they came to a halt before two massive gates set in a high wall.

"Haw, Loonie!" said Deveney, "they're gaun to pit ye in the mad-hoose."

There was truth in the jest. Three companies of the battalion were billeted in a mad-house. The asylum had lain empty for years, it is true, unfit for the insane, but it was good enough for troops. Out of the rotten wainscoting of the room in which Col and John lay down to sleep grey rats came out to run over their prostrate forms. Damp, discoloured paper hung in festoons from the walls. There was in the rooms and the dark corridors the dank smell of death.

But the novelty of change was sufficient to keep the men of A Company from regretting too bitterly the comforts of Cults Farm. The town, as Col had vaguely surmised on the night of their arrival, was very much like the town they had left—a seaport sprawling grey on the banks of an estuary. But here the people spoke with the uprising inflection of the East country. There were new pubs, new

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cinemas, new fried fish shops to explore. The girls were accommodating towards the kilted strangers. Now there were no wives and sweethearts to whom an adventurous man might feel punctiliously responsible.

On Col, however, none of these novelties had much effect. Living in queer, misty dreams of his own, he was strangely indifferent to environment. He raised no question, no appeal against fate. He had been suddenly separated from his bride, and he dreamed of her charms, but he did not burn and plan to get back to her. The battalion had moved—he accepted the compulsion. There was always John's company to divert him. Solemnly in their hours of freedom they played together on their chanters. The only definite regret which afflicted Col was that the band was still dispersed. He was genuinely resentful of the necessity that had eclipsed its glory.

But there was little time for moping of any kind. The battalion soon discovered that it had not crossed Scotland to train for war. A phrase of Deveney's crystallised the popular view.

"Crivvens alive! They might as well give us helmets and make us polismen right aff!"

For here there were bridges, docks, gas-works, power-stations and reservoirs to be guarded as in their native town. That enterprising Germans might not wipe out a city's population by decanting a culture of typhus bacilli in the water supply, twenty men passed cold dark nights in a hut on the moors. As the reservoir had a coast line of at least seven miles, even the clumsiest of poisoners could have slipped through the cordon at fifty different points. But it was like that in 1915. The men

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asked why such fatuous services should be demanded of them.

Those were the days of the first Zeppelin raids, and the defensive theories of the War Office cost Col Macaulay many a miserable night. The predominant notion was, apparently, that motor-cars with bright headlights were guiding the Zeppelin pilots over the eastern counties. It became the business of the battalion to see that no motorist could, without proving his innocence, leave or approach by night the city they guarded.

From the town radiated a dozen roads, and each was blocked when darkness fell. Sometimes it was by a permanent barrier built at the junction of a side-road, into which the challenged traveller might turn. Or they laid a stout pole on trestles and awaited the coming of the enemy. There were passwords to be demanded of wayfarers in uniform, and these were dictated from Whitehall.

"Fat Boy"—"Wild Duck"—"Panjandrum"
. . . so ran three of these childish shibboleths. The trouble with a man like Col was that he could not be trusted to remember one for more than five minutes.

Nevertheless, it was a business taken solemnly, this trapping of spies with the paraphernalia of barriers and passwords. The soldiers huddled round braziers by the roadsides. Some nights rain lashed on their curved and miserable backs, spitting at the fire and soaking through the thick greatcoats. Again the East winds of the early spring blew from the North Sea and caught at their throats, so that a hacking cough was often the only sign of life from a group of forms about a brazier.

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They caught no spies. Most often they held up a doctor rushing to answer a call and worried to death by the fatuous formalities of the barrier. Or they would exchange a jest with an old farmer and his wife, jogging back from the market on a high gig. Once they tore triumphantly from a hired limousine, out of the arms of a painted lady, a major of yeomanry whose drink-thickened tongue boggled sadly over "Panjandrum." And once they saved a tinker woman, on the verge of childbirth, from the feet of a drunken husband.

"It would be grand training for the Boys' Brigade," said Deveney.

At the dawn, they marched back to their billet in the mad-house.

They were allowed to sleep until noon. Then a sergeant would rouse them out for fatigue—stores to be unloaded at the station, the floors to be scrubbed, the weed-choked garden of the asylum to be delved. Or they were taken for a route-march, and never a stave of music to cheer them on the way save that produced by their own inveterately buoyant hearts.

It was during these weeks that men grew restless. Their duties of home defence were monotonous and, many of them, patently absurd. Every man in the battalion had a brother or a friend whose unit was training for war in some other part of the country. The pride of the battalion was hurt. It was, the men felt, no battalion: without a band, without a corporate life. They itched to be into training. In 1915, young men were eager for the fray.

Of all the many symptoms of slackness in the

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battalion then, the most obvious was a general demand for leave. Married men confessed to their company commanders a degree of uxoriousness altogether startling. Bachelors told of dying mothers, of the weddings of sisters, of the funerals of grandparents. And for diplomatic purposes leave was readily granted.

So the battalion came in touch again with its domestic circle. News and gossip were carried backwards and forwards across the breadth of Scotland. Men went on leave bearing messages for wives and sweethearts; they returned with socks, cakes and balaclava helmets. But the chief merchandise of these transactions was gossip. Heavy-hearted women at home heard from gloating neighbours dark tales of scandal about their men. Private soldiers came to learn with bitterness that infidelity is not a weakness of the male alone. Told at second hand, third hand, the stories lost nothing in the telling.

Most men returned curiously silent from leave and answered questions roughly.

"Ach, it's just the same dirty old hole it always was," they would grumble of their native town.

Yet, as the disgust at returning to duty passed away, each of them had a fine tale of scandal to unfold before his comrades over a brazier on some lonely road or in a low-browed pub of the back streets.

By these transactions Col Macaulay was for long unaffected. He had a wife at home, but it simply was not in him to make a move towards her company. Somehow, the fact of inevitable separation closed his mind to all idea of enterprise. Nor did

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the gossip carried by the travellers disturb him. It was of a society to which he was a stranger. In any event, it was not to such as Col, a foreigner, that they addressed their confidences. Col was just a Highlander, a bit daft, not of their seething Lowland world. They left him alone with his chanter and his simple confidences with John Macleod.

As with most realities of existence, the idea of going home was put into Col's mind by John, and even to John the hint of necessity came by accident. At midnight, in the room they shared with six others, he heard them whispering. . . .

It was Johnnie Foster who had returned that night from leave. On arrival he had been as taciturn as the rest. . . "Ach, the same dirty old hole it always was . . ." But he had gone out in the evening with his mate, Jock Campbell, and now at midnight they returned slightly drunk. The clatter of their entry wakened John. He blinked a little as they strove in their tipsy fashion to light a candle. Then he would have fallen back into sleep at once had they not raised a topic that was near to him. He lay with his eyes closed and listened to Johnnie Foster's giggling scandal.

"There's old Loonie," he hiccupped to his mate. "The same silly old sixpence he always was. He's got a rare old handful of trouble waitin' for him at hame."

"Trouble?" slurred Jock Campbell. "Whar about trouble? Old Loonie in trouble. . . . Gees!"

John heard the drunken giggle of Johnnie Foster. It came from the floor. The candle had been blown out. Though he strained to catch what was said, he isolated only fragments of that bibulous libel.

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"Yon big tart he merrit. . . . Her oot the big hoose by the farm. . . . I heard it frae ma brother's wife. Aye, God's truth." Johnnie Foster laughed. "She didna ken it was comin' so quick. . . . Took her away in an ambulance. . . . It's the God's truth. Merrit two months. . . ."

The whisperers giggled in unison over that humorous reflection. Then one of them yawned loudly.

"I'm gaun' to sleep. 'Night, Jock."

"'Night, Johnnie."

Soon they were snoring together. But John Macleod could not sleep. He turned a little so that he felt the warmth of Col's body near him. He put out a hand to touch the rough frieze of the greatcoat that covered his friend. The contact sent a stab of pity to his heart. Poor old Col, old Loonie! A lump came into John's throat for the innocent helplessness of his friend before life's sordidness. Old Loonie . . .

Before he fell asleep again, John decided that Col must be prevented somehow from returning home. The battalion could not get to the Front too soon. Yet, before next evening, Col was in the train for the West, vehemently urged to the adventure by John. The story of Kirsty Galbraith was common property by noon. It threatened to become an open jest. There was nothing for it but to urge Col into the Orderly Room and hurry him to the train before he should have the foul thing thrown in his face.

It was near midnight when the last train from Glasgow brought Col to the Central Station. A soft drizzle of rain was falling, but he climbed to the top-deck of the tram-car, so keen was his delight at returning to Kirsty and so great his need to be

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alone with that warm anticipation. He wondered if she would be in bed, dreaming of him. The idea of her extreme loneliness occurred to him with dramatic force. He wished that the tram-car would not stop so often.

Opposite the India Dock he dropped off and hastened up Kip Street. It was narrow and dark, but he kept his eyes lifted for the glow of lamplight through the window of their room. There was no light there. She must be in bed, asleep. He hurried up the stairs and knocked cheerfully at a battered door.

There was no reply. Listening raptly, he could hear no stir within. He knocked again, and the sound echoed in an empty room. He felt the clutch of apprehension at his throat. For the third time he knocked, paused, then called aloud, "Kirsty!" His voice rattled down the well of the winding stairs.

Suddenly he became aware that another door behind him had opened, and he wheeled round to see under the pale radiance of the gas-jet the large, raddled face of a big woman in bodice and petticoat.

"She's no' in," said a dreary voice.

Col stared at the expanse of bleary face.

"She's awa'," the voice went on. "She's awa' to the Maternity. It's mair nor a week since." The pale eyes brightened momentarily with interest. "You'll be her man, mebbe?"

But Col could not speak to this harriidan; he could not discuss with a stranger the thing that disappointed him so sorely. He turned abruptly and went down the stairs. The stupid eyes followed his going.

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At first he had it in his mind to go back to the station and wait for a train. Actually, his thoughts confused, he walked for a time in that direction, a lone figure with rifle and pack. Then he remembered Bella Deveney, and the thought was like a flash of light through darkness. He turned eastwards again.

His first knock at Deveney's door brought no response, but on repeating it, he heard the stir of human movement within. The lighting of the gas sent a beam through the keyhole. Loosely-slippered feet skiffed across the linoleum. Col knocked again.

"Who's there?" asked the voice of Bella.

"It's Col," he said.

The key turned in the lock, and Col found himself blinking in the gaslight. Before him stood Bella, her face white, her hand on the knob of the door. She wore a brown coat over her nightdress, and her hair hung in plaits.

"Where's Kirsty?" he blundered.

She stared at him.

"Oh . . . Oh . . ." she hesitated. "Oh Col! Ye gave me a mortal fright. Come in and I'll make ye a cup of tea."

The fire was still glowing, and gladly he sat down before it, but Bella did not ask him to take off his sodden greatcoat.

Rapidly she filled the kettle, fetched a cup and saucer, and spooned into the brown pot tea from a gaudy tin. Dully he watched her, then repeated his question.

"Where's Kirsty?"

She turned from the fire to look him in the face.

"Did ye no' hear?" she asked.

"In the Maternity . . ." faltered Col.

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"Aye. She had a wean. I'm real sorry for ye, Col."

She thrust a steaming cup into his hand and offered him a thick slice of bread and jam. While he ate and drank, she told him all she knew. It was not much. That Kirsty was to have a baby had been obvious, but Kirsty had made no preparation. The illness had come suddenly upon her, and there had been a call for an ambulance. Bella had seen the baby—"a fine wee boy."

His supper eaten, Col sat staring at the dying fire, a man confused. The voice of Bella, quiet but firm, broke into his thoughts at length.

"Ye can't stay here, Col, ye know," she said.

At once he rose, slipped his rifle over his shoulder, and smiled gently at the good woman.

"Where will ye go?" she asked anxiously.

"Och, what does it matter?" he said with a pallid smile. "Good-night!"

As the door closed behind him Mrs. Deveney drew her arm across her eyes.

Col got a bed in a Home for Working Men. Weary and dulled by disappointment, he slept heavily. In the morning he made at once for the Central Station. To return to the battalion seemed the obvious thing to do, and no other possibility occurred to him. When he reached the station, however, they told him that he must wait fifty minutes for a train. He sat for a time on a bench, while goods trains and locals puffed past the shabby platforms. Then he wearied for lack of something to do, and it occurred to him that he might, after all, see Kirsty. Against her he felt no anger; her failure had no more than obliterated a sentiment. Now it came to him that

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he ought to see her before he went back, even if it were only to make a decent end of the business. He loped from the station and up the hill.

To the ward in which she lay they admitted him at once. The reception nurse was even coy in her welcome to the tall soldier. She preceded him into the ward and announced him loudly.

"Here he is, Mrs. Macaulay! Show him his wee son—he's just dying to see him."

The nurse dived towards a cot beside Kirsty's and unearthed a bundle, which she thrust into Col's arms. The bundle revealed in a halo of shawls a red, ill-tempered face.

"Isn't he a fine wee man?" the nurse demanded to know, and laughed at the foolish grin which came on Col's face. She snatched the child from his arms and packed the bundle into the cot again. "Now you can talk to your wife," she said.

And Col turned his pale blue eyes to the fallow, frightened face of Kirsty.

"Oh, Col . . ." she whispered.

He had to smile at her, so gentle was the heart of him, so pitiful and foolish she looked.

"Are you terrible angry with me?" she asked.

"Och, that!" he said.

It was all he could say. He could neither soothe nor blame her, for she had removed herself from the scope of his sympathy. He just sat and smiled at her sadly.

"I'm terrible sorry, Col," she went on feverishly. "I've been that bad. I'll be good, Col—I'll be awful good when I get out. You will come back to see me, Col?"

She seemed indifferent to the interested stares

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of the other women in the ward, but Col was glad when a nurse hurried up with a red screen and imprisoned them within its shelter.

"You will come back, Col, will you not?" she implored.

"We'll see, we'll see," he soothed her. "Just you lie quiet now and get better."

"Oh, Col, you'll not go away!"

"I am going for the train now," he said.

He rose, and she held out her arms.

"But before you go—to the War—you'll come back, won't you, Col? I'll be good, Col. Oh . . ."

"We'll see, we'll see," he said.

He gathered his bonnet and kit. Still she held out her arms, but he did not stoop to her pleading. He pitied her deeply, but she had ceased somehow to have a claim on him.

"Oh, Col . . ." she mourned to him.

"Rest you," he said kindly. "Mebbe I will come back soon. We'll see, we'll see."

As he passed behind the screen he heard her sob, only once, but very mournfully.

CHAPTER VIII

THE weeks passed. Night after night, groups of weary men barricaded country roads and held up motor-cars that might be guiding Zeppelins over the eastern shires. Lonely patrols set out in the teeth of bitter winds to walk across the long railway bridge that spans the estuary. The Zeppelin-hunters laid not a single spy by the heels, the patrols no dynamiter. The monotony was broken only once, when a lance-corporal, pacing the permanent way over the bridge while the wind howled and the river hissed below, was run down by the midnight express and mangled to death beneath its wheels.

They did not know, the men of the battalion, that they were lucky. They did not realise that the monotony of coast defence was nothing to the abysmal boredom of the trenches. They could not foresee, in 1915, that death must come to many of them in particularly beastly forms. They were young, impatient, and they were proud. They burned to get away.

A few deserted. Of the deserters, some were never heard of again; some were known to have re-enlisted in the Regulars. Others shammed sick or proved themselves tradesmen indispensable to industry. One man, of No. 1 Platoon, shot off the forefinger of his right hand. It was an achievement neatly accomplished. Coming off guard at dawn

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one morning, watched by an unsuspecting corporal, he held the finger over the muzzle of his rifle and, while pretending to tighten the sling, brought his hand down on the trigger. The shot sounded but faintly on the open quay. The severed finger twirled up into the air and fell. A plausible accident. . . . Without Court Martial, Private Macalpine, No. 1873, went back to civil life.

But the majority held together, inveterately cheerful. Something would happen, some day. They worked, joked, drank, made love, and slept. Each day was full enough of trivial incident.

"Ach, we're buried here for the remainder," Deveney would say.

. And an odd jest was in popular currency in the ranks. This fantastic anecdote forecasted how, on a distant summer day after the War, Lord Kitchener would be playing a round of golf with an old comrade. In the middle of the game, K. of K. was to throw down his clubs and curse violently.

"Good Lord!" he was to cry, "I've just remembered that I left a Territorial battalion at Don!"

This trivial fancy amused these soldiers vastly. It was a jest that even Col could appreciate. Not that Col had much hope or interest left in him. The band had been broken up, and Kirsty Galbraith had failed him. Now he drifted merely, dully obedient to whatever demands were made of him. A rifle in the Army, he was swamped and lost.

How could he and his companions calculate the mood of those who controlled their destinies? They had not been educated beyond the three R's. Of politics, economics, history and geography they

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knew nothing. Half a dozen at the most could have presented a reasonable case for their mobilisation in arms. In the vast complicated game of war they were the most numerous of all the groups of players engaged, and the most indifferent. They were to be asked to pay the heaviest price, but they could not criticise the transaction.

During that Spring of 1915 a pretty bill was being run up to their account. A thin line in Flanders was being desperately held by their brothers, without guns or shells to help them. The Navy had failed at the Dardanelles, and the politicians, forgetful of the warning they had given the enemy, planned to throw thousands of men at the lonely beaches under Sedd-el-Bahr. While Col and John and Deveney shivered over a brazier on the Blair-Atholl road, their bodies were being disposed of by anxious conferences in Whitehall. And the soldiers did not know. Probably it was just as well.

Actually, they were overjoyed when, out of the blue, came the news that the battalion was to move again. Now the orders were explicit, splendidly direct. They were to go into training for war ; in two days' time they were to move to a divisional area. They were given the number of their Division. Beaming, the Pipe Major came to Col and John and said that the band was being re-formed.

On the strength of that information many men got drunk. One hopeful spirit expended ten rounds of ball ammunition in an unsuccessful effort to smash the face of the clock on the Parish Church. Col and John filled with wailing music the corridors of the mad-house till their comrades threatened them with assault. All the weariness of six weeks past was

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forgotten, and a thousand men went fey at the thought of going to war.

The pipers played them to the station, and they sang while the trains hurled them across Fifeshire. They were done with gasworks, reservoirs, power-houses. Their billets in the schools and warehouses of Dunfermline rang with laughter and ribald jest. Battalion Orders that night ordained a parade for physical exercise at half-past six next morning, and men cheered the news.

The battalion discovered that it had a soul. Coast defence had broken it up into groups ; now a thousand men did the same thing at once and with the same end in view. They exercised together in the mornings, hundreds of them contorting their limbs in unison in the Public Park. They marched out a thousand strong in the forenoons and were together all day, drilling, entrenching, shooting, fighting sham battles over moor and hill. The Spring sun shone on them, tanning their faces, hands and knees. The bodies of these children of industry filled out, their muscles hardened. They became aware of strength, and the awareness gave them pride. Men guarded against slackness of behaviour and of dress so that the repute of the battalion might not suffer. Harry Barley cooked now in a duck suit of spotless white.

Now they had about them a sense of purpose and real promise. They were going to fight, and the certainty was stimulating. New rifles with clean brown stocks were issued within the first week, and men burned to test them on the ranges. Specialist sections evolved, and about the fields where they trained were scattered groups of technicians, playing,

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gravely intent, with the dangerous toys of their craft—buzzers, revolvers, telephones, machine-guns. Staff Officers came to watch them at work and to coach them in special arts. Now they learned the reception proper to a Brigadier, and there was none so dour or gawky as to refuse a salute to a junior officer with the face of a cherub.

They were young and proud and keen. They worked in a rhythm that was beautiful. To see them pass, straight and hardy and lovely in youth, was a sight for tears. And girls and dogs and grand-mothers and old, done men cried out when the column went swinging past along the road that was to lead some of them to death, many of them to pain and deformity, and all to weariness of soul.

"Pretty useful bunch," said the staff officers, biting at their little moustaches.

Came a day near the end of the month when they were tested. An order reached headquarters and young officers went out with thoughtful faces to the billets of their platoons. No. 1 was assembled in the gaunt gymnasium of a Y.M.C.A. hall.

"Platoon—'Shun!"

And they clicked to attention like one man. The boy who was to be largely responsible for their lives stepped forward and unfolded a sheet of paper.

"I have something to read to you," he said.

He read. The phraseology of the order was cold and technical. Some of the men did not understand. But the Army does not allow questions from the ranks.

"I'll come back in half an hour," the subaltern concluded, "and see what you have to say. Each man must decide for himself."

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His going was followed by the outbreak of clamour. What did it mean? Go back home? Out of the Army? Men shouted at each other and swore. At last the room was dominated by the voice of Deveney, louder and more raucous than the rest.

"Look here, youse blocks!" he roared. "Listen to me—"

It was simple. Workers were required for munitions. Those soldiers who belonged to certain classes of skilled operatives could, if they wished, doff the King's uniform and without question return to civil life.

The men stared at each other. The hearts of some jumped to the sudden promise of relief from discipline. For the men of No. 1 Platoon, shipyard-workers all, might lay down their rifles and be free to-morrow. The noise of disputation broke out afresh. Men swore at each other forcefully. Some stood aloof, silent and thoughtful. At length Deveney's roar commanded silence.

"Here, youse blocks!" he cried, truculently defiant, "I'll knock the flakin' heid aff any man that says he's going back. There now! Any of youse want a fight?"

They roared with laughter at this splendid challenge—and with relief, for Deveney had given the lead. Men slapped each other on the back and shook hands solemnly.

The young officer returned, and Deveney was pushed forward to speak the mind of No. 1 Platoon.

"I think we'll stick to the sodgerin', sir," he said.

A smile of relief and gratitude transformed the face of the boy. "Good lads!" he said. He

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hesitated, as if he could say more. Then he turned and walked quickly away.

"He's a great wee fella, that," said Deveney appreciatively to the fifty comrades who had elected to serve unto death with the beardless youth.

It is a fact of historical interest that no man of that battalion chose to leave the ranks. Hundreds might have done so, but none could face unpopularity. Among the majority was an enthusiasm so infectious that those who inclined to hesitate were moved in the end by the sentiment of comradeship to take the general risk. There came upon them all the auto-intoxication of conscious fitness. They panted to be at the enemy with cold steel, lunging and cursing as they had been taught.

They were not starved of promising news. First they heard of divisional artillery moving in mysterious ways by night. Then they learned that a brigade of Fusiliers and Kosbies had entrained in the first stages of the great divisional trek. One morning they wakened to hear ghastly news of how one battalion had lost half its effectives in a railway smash—four hundred good men sent to glory in the dead of night, burned to death on a pyre of blazing woodwork.

That day there arrived for the battalion transport some fifty mules, roaring, gawky beasts that made of the station yard an inferno. A hundred men were marched down to assist the transport section in detraining those monstrosities, but yet the animals broke loose, and all Fife was loud that night with the shouts of the chase. It was only at dawn next morning that they corralled the last of the spirited hermaphrodites.

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The chase was followed immediately by the supreme sensation. Sharp orders arrived at the billets, and subalterns went about with anxious faces and eyes critical of the polish of buttons and buckles and of the shape and set of packs. Was every rifle clean, every cartridge-pouch full, every bayonet bright? Sergeants examined entrenching tools for spots of rust, and corporals criticised the tying of puttees.

"Jings!" said Deveney. "It looks as if we're off for Buckingham Palace."

By half-past nine the battalion was assembled in column, stretching the length of a street. At its head was the band, and the Pipe Major sported his ceremonial banneret. Up and down the line on a nervous horse pricked the anxious adjutant. The Colonel scowled from the eminence of a great black gelding's back. Plainly they were on the edge of a great occasion, and the men were keyed to excitement. At last the adjutant reported all present and correct. The Colonel bawled. At his "Quick—*march*" the line moved forward, a machine that functioned perfectly. At their head, beating time and bellowing their pride, went pipes and drums. It was *The Black Bear* they played.

Dogs and boys followed them through the streets. At the pavement's edge old men stood erect, their hats in their hands, their eyes wet. Servant girls rushed to windows and hung out giggling, over many a sill was waved the white sheet from some decent burgher's bed. Shopkeepers in white aprons came to their doors, and the girls in a laundry poured from the building to shriek at the soldiers passing. The sun shone on their arms and badges and buttons. A

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wind from the West fluttered the ribbons of the pipes. The horses caracoled behind the drums, and one of them shied as a pale butterfly of early summer, lost among the houses, dithered before its silly eyes. The kilts swung rhythmically, but the lines were steady and straight, and a town went mad when a thousand men went by and their wild music filled the narrow streets.

Out along the white roads of that flat country the battalion marched, until, beckoned by a red-tabbed officer, the band wheeled into a park. Straight to the centre of that wide expanse they marched; at a point marked by a fluttering flag they halted. In mass they stood, and company after company sent flashes of flame through the morning air as bayonets were fixed. There they stood until along the road, followed by an attendant plume of dust, slid a great car with a flag on the bonnet of it.

Four officers came through the gate, tiny figures in the distance, but it was seen that the bands round their hats were red. Foremost strode a tall man, a ribbon of colour across his left breast. His companions halted; the tall man came on alone. There rose over the field the reedy tune of a salute, and the Colonel's voice rasped harshly.

"Battalion! Present . . . *arms!*"

A thousand bayonets flashed in the sun, as if a giant had drawn his mighty sword. At that bright bidding, the tall officer halted, clicked his heels together, and stood long at the salute. A horse tossed his head and jangled his harness. Far up in the blue droned an aeroplane.

For fully a minute the General faced his troops. No man can say what was in his mind. Did he

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tremble to think that the lives of those thousand men were in his hands? Surely he could not look on the assembled strength of them without a thrill of pride at the tragic nobility of the sight.

Then the moment passed. The raised arm of the tall man fell to his side, and he walked forward to greet the Colonel. Back to the tough shoulders swung the rifles. From the solemnity of the salute the band turned to a jaunty march.

It was nothing for those hardened soldiers to stand still while the General walked among the ranks and looked at their faces. They were confident in their own fitness. They were not big men, but they were big-boned, and years in the shipyards had given most of them the chests and necks of bulls. It did not, at all events, take long to satisfy the General. Soon they were saluting him again. Within twenty minutes of its arrival, the car was speeding back along the dusty road once more.

"We're for it now, chaps," said Deveney conclusively.

They were for it. The battalion did no work that afternoon. Surrounded by mobs of eager applicants, subalterns and sergeants in every billet dealt with claims for preference in the matter of Embarkation Leave. By the evening trains there departed for home a large and noisy party.

It did not at first occur to Col Macaulay that he also might visit the West for, possibly, the last time. For that town on the banks of the Clyde he had no sentimental longing; rather the thought of it oppressed him slightly for its reminder of the wound that a woman's faithlessness had dealt him. He was happy only with John Macleod, anywhere with John.

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There were no geographical sign-posts on the road of his life. Homeless, a waif on the featureless flats of existence, he did not even long in ancient sentiment for the beaches and machars of the Islands. Between his consciousness and that forgotten picture hung a screen of industrial smoke.

The notion of going West was John's, and Col followed the lead without question. John, more sensible than Col of practical advantages, did not see why he should not have a holiday like the rest. At that point his originality stopped. Whereas they might have gone to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Oban, anywhere, dull habit took them back to the town where they had enlisted. They did not consider the claims of more amusing centres of civilisation.

Deveney was of the party with which they travelled in an afternoon train, and a jovial party it was. These soldiers did not pause to look out of windows at the meadows and hills of the Scotland they were so soon to leave. They whirled past the noble rock of Stirling and did not look up from its gigantic shadow. They did not see the rare windings of the Forth along its splendid valley, nor did they mark the dramatic transition from the richness of that glen to the cold clay of Stirlingshire. That the black talons of Glasgow stretched for miles into the country did not touch them. Four of them, with a greatcoat stretched over their knees, played nap with a sort of vigorous cunning. The others watched the game and cheered the growth of Deveney's winnings.

Arrived in Glasgow, they turned into a cavernous public-house in Buchanan Street and drank glasses of neat whisky. Short of the Central Station they

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stopped again to drink. Noisy with oaths was the compartment they occupied in the coast train, and keener than ever was the play. The whisky gave them recklessness ; they doubled the stakes. None of them looked up beyond Bishopton to see the evening sun stream golden up the River. The stench of their cigarettes kept out the keen, clean smells of the western seas. And when, at their destination at last, they tumbled out on the platform, Deveney gathered his cronies about him.

"Come on, chaps," he said, "an' we'll hae a drink."

It was past seven, and the evening was fine. Over that grey town on the hillside the sun, swimming in flaming colour above the great Highland hills, had laid a mantle of gold. The streets were bright and lively with colour. Out of the windows hung ample housewives, gossiping pleasantly in the easeful hour of sunset. In men, returning after a long exile, the scene might have set up a feeling for the dearness of home, for the friendliness of old association. The untried soldier of 1915 was of sterner stuff.

"Come on, chaps," said Deveney, "an' we'll hae a drink."

They had not one drink but several. The more they had, the more did it seem to them a fine, rich experience for men to drink together. The claims of wives, sweethearts, mothers became of no account : these duties could wait. It was enough that a man should be drinking with his friends, appreciating the excellence of their characters and the warmth of their comradeship. That was life at its richest.

They drank crudely. It was after the second

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round that the fertile and reckless mind of Deveney insisted that they should consume, not merely whisky, but what he called "glasses and chasers." One consumed a glass of whisky and washed it down with a pint of beer. A drink for heroes. There were eight of them, and a fellow has to stand his hand all round.

The lamps were lit before the barmen, fearful for the house's reputation, persuaded them to go. But they went cheerfully, for the idea that they should move elsewhere struck them unanimously as a noble suggestion. Deveney shook a barman warmly by the hand. They passed out of the shop, lurching against each other and colliding with the swing-doors. The ring they formed on the pavement outside was in the nature of a committee on procedure.

"Ach, t'hell!" cried Deveney desperately. "Come on we'll go to the second hoose o' the Hippodrome."

An inspiration that. No other course of action was possible. They crowded, shouting and laughing, into the back row of the pit. Aggrieved members of the audience turned to scowl at them, but they did not care. Deveney offered to fight any two of their critics

Col discovered that the stage swayed before his eyes. It seemed to him that his ears had been plugged up, and that there was pandemonium within his head. That troubled him greatly, and he sought for relief in concentrating on what was passing behind the footlights. At first he could distinguish nothing, could see but a pink blur. Gradually, however, there emerged from that blur the face of a girl, then her

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body, then her legs. Particularly her legs. She flourished festoons of dingy lace at the pit.

John Macleod was being violently sick at his side, but Col could see nothing but that woman on the stage and her provocation. His body trembled, and his muddled mind filled with longing. It was not a raw physical desire that irked him, but a realisation, of startling freshness, that solace was to be found only with a woman. Women offered refuge, forgetfulness; with women a man could rest from . . . from all the things that trouble a man. You wanted to fling yourself into a pair of warm, kind arms. They would not ask questions.

Col's mind worked in chaotic flashes. He thought of Kirsty, his wife. She suddenly became desirable. She would take him and be kind to him. Together they would lose themselves.

He rose, moving the bench in front.

"Wheesh!" hissed an angry voice.

But Col began to push his way out. The loud, protesting voice of Deveney followed him.

"Haw, Loonie . . ."

And the cry was taken up by his companions. Even John Macleod hiccupped a sad appeal. But Col was beyond all that. His whole mind was bent on getting out, on going to Kirsty.

He could never remember afterwards how he got to her room. His first consciousness was of her appearance at the door, her big body in nothing but a chemise of pink and grey flannelette. She gaped at him. He did not notice that she sought to hold the door against his entrance. So urgent was his passion, he pushed her aside.

A man rose from a mattress on the floor. He was

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in singlet and drawers. On a chair lay the uniform of a private in the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Before the man was properly on his feet, Col rushed at him, battering at his face in a frenzy to hurt and kill.

The fight was fierce and confused. The man was wiry, and if the drink and the shock had roused in Col a passion irresistible, whisky had blurred his sense of distance. They scuffled over the mattress, over the waxcloth on the floor. At one moment Col smelt the burning of his own hair among the cinders in the fireplace. Then a table crashed over, carrying with it a pile of crockery. Col ground the face of his enemy among the brittle shards. They rolled against the walls, against a dresser, panting, kicking, pounding with their fists. Shreds of clothing littered the floor. Here and there were smears of blood. Hopping ludicrously before the combatants, her hands over her eyes, Kirsty shrieked like a woman gone mad.

Suddenly Col realised that he was at the open door, that his opponent was beneath him. His fingers gripped that straining throat; he pounded the head on the floor. The consciousness passed from the staring eyes. Slowly Col rose above his victim and looked curiously at the unconscious body that had now but a rag of woollen stuff about one shoulder. Then he stooped and dragged his enemy out on to the landing, leaving him to the charity of those appreciative neighbours who had gathered to watch the fight and applaud Col's violence of retribution.

Col locked the door behind him. Now Kirsty was crouching on the mattress, her face in her hands. Slowly he unfastened a leather belt from about his waist; slowly he advanced upon her and gripped

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her shoulder. She squealed at the touch, but he brought the belt down on her back. She screamed in pain and fear, and once again he lashed at her quivering body. So he thrashed her unmercifully while, from a soap-box in the corner, a baby wailed for his mother.

At length he left her to lie moaning on the mattress. Carefully he gathered from the floor those things of his that had been shed in the fight. Then he went out to look for John Macleod.

CHAPTER IX

THEY marched to the station at five in the afternoon, and it seemed that the female population of Fifeshire went with them, striding largely to keep step to the tune of *The Black Bear*. Young men kissed young women they had never seen before. Subalterns merely smiled when hoydens from the mills broke the ranks and marched among the men. There was something special about the occasion; it was saturnalia for ten mad minutes. But the white gates of the station were resolutely closed against civilians. Ardent vows of affection had to be exchanged across the width of a siding, and the kisses that were thrown missed their marks among a crowd so large and restless.

It was the hour of man's predominance. For two months the girls of the town had been the objects of attention—and now they fought for glances from their heroes. Innocent maidens discovered for the first time that they had rivals, that their swains had not reserved for them a strict singleness of devotion. They could fight among themselves, but they could not chide the heroes now departing. And the soldiers did not care. Strong in the pride of doing, they laughed at those womanly weaknesses. They gave their kisses impartially. They did not care. It was their hour. To-morrow they were to die.

Inevitably, the dirge of "Tipperary" rose among

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the crowd. Shortly it was drowned by a chorus from spirits more robust.

Here we are ! Here we are ! Here we are again !

When the quavering voice of a girl on the other side of the fence set up the national parting-song, the soldiers laughed at her. Perhaps their rudeness covered a pain. It is a difficult question to answer that—"Will ye no' come back again?" The men insisted that the occasion should be cheerful. Their parting jests were broad and greatly appreciated by the mill-girls. It became apparent to the subalterns that many of their men were drunk. A rigorous official search for bottles of whisky interrupted the farewells.

At last a whistle screamed. From the crowded windows of the train rose a roar—not of farewell nor of sorrow, but a roar of wild men saluting adventure. The voices of the women skirled in unison. The train slipped away, and each group saw the other recede farther and farther till men and women passed from each other's sight for ever. As the carriages jolted on to the main line and raced along, all that could be heard above the whirr of the wheels was the thin wail of Col's pipes in a carriage at the rear, frenziedly blowing the tune of *Bundle and Go*.

"Well, chaps," said Deveney sententiously, "we're up the flakin' gum tree, noo."

But they were not yet reconciled to this exciting change. Men hung from the windows and roared at cottages, cows, haystacks. Their train rushed beneath the mighty girders of the Forth Bridge, and they sent a howl of greeting to the battle-cruisers squat on the rippled waters far below. They were still cheering when the express roared through the

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Waverley Station of Edinburgh, making for the South and the Channel ports.

In the carriage that held Col and John a violent argument broke out. It occurred to them to wonder what their destination might be. Deveney's loud voice dominated the discussion.

"The Dardanelles!" he cried at Harry Barley's suggestion, "the Dardanelles, yer bunnet! We're for France, an' don't you forget it."

"No, we're no'," said Harry firmly. "It's the Dardanelles, I'll bate ye whit ye like."

"I'll bate ye a bob it's France."

"I'll bate ye a bob it's no'."

"Ach, to bleezes wi' you!"

They would argue like that for hours. Such was the measure of their pitiful ignorance. Not one of them could have pointed out the Dardanelles on the map. They had one fierce debate on the geographical issue. It was John Macleod who had asked where Gallipoli was. Deveney laid down the law.

"It's in India," he said.

"India, yer face!" cried Harry Barley.

"Whaur is it, then?"

"It's in Palestine—the Holy Land."

"Yer holy bunnet! I'm tellin' ye it's in India."

It was mildly suggested by John Macleod that it was in Italy.

"An' how the hell d'ye get the Turks fightin' in Italy?" Deveney wanted to know.

"An' how the hell d'ye get them fightin' in India?" cried Harry.

"Because it's India they come from, pudden-heid!"

"Pudden'-heid yersel'."

To these interminable arguments, a faint smile on

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his mild face, Col listened in silence. He could not follow the disputations, for they dealt with points in which he had no interest. The immediate environment was all that existed for him ; the battalion was his world. Even of battalion life his grasp was incomplete, and he had need for little more than the friendship of John Macleod and Deveney and Harry Barley. That old passion for the glory of a piper's life had gone from him. Now he was a private soldier, drifting with the majority towards a destiny about which he was in no way curious. Things just happened to him.

Without curiosity he watched through the carriage windows the changing panorama without. In the glow of a fine May evening they speeded down the rocky East coast of Scotland. Anon the train swung westwards, and the line ran among the sage-green uplands of the Cheviots. It was lonely treeless country, a country of sheep, with here and there a white cottage in the bield of a spur. Had somebody told Col that they were in France, he would have accepted the information uncritically.

It was nearly dark when the train slipped into the vast station at Carlisle and came to rest. Immediately a sergeant seized upon Col and posted him at the door of a refreshment room with orders to bar his comrades from its attraction. He stood there for half-an-hour and watched them dancing hilarious reels and quadrilles on the resounding platforms. He saw how the soldier, with the instinct of a small boy, will fight for draughts of water at a public fountain. It seemed that every water-bottle must be filled. A score of drunken men were conducted by solicitous friends to the lavatories.

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They looked foolish, somehow, without their uniform caps.

At last the whistle blew. "All aboard! Come on! Come on!" yelled the N.C.O.s. Doors slammed, and rough voices shouted warnings down the length of the train. Again the whistle squealed, and the engines jerked the heavy train into motion. They pulled out into the night that was over Westmorland and settled down to the long ascent of Shap. Deveney peered through the window.

"Gees, it's dark, chaps!" he said. "We might as well doss it out."

Immediately they composed themselves for slumber and were soon asleep.

When Col stirred at length from the heavy sleep that comes upon a man in the thick atmosphere of a rigidly-sealed compartment, the sun was shining over a country flatter and richer than he had ever seen before. Lovely it looked in the still clarity of the early morning, peaceful, soft. There was a wealth of trees here and thick bushy hedges. In the wide fields, immobile, stood cattle of a colour and shape that were strange to a man of the North. Wondering, he saw across the plain the spires of a great church, faint but noble in the distance. Col did not know that he looked upon Hereford Cathedral.

Still his companions slept while the train rushed on. The spires of Hereford passed behind. They sped into a country more hilly, a district of green, narrow glens, smiling in the early sun. Shortly the brakes jarred beneath them. Col's companions stirred and rubbed their eyes. The train drew up by the long platform of a country station.

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"Pontypool Road," read Deveney, peering at a plaque of blue and white. "Whaur the hell's Pontypool Road?"

They had breakfast there—sandwiches and coffee, gulped in haste, in the station buffet. Then they were off again, under the Severn and through Bristol, Taunton, Exeter. At Exeter they caught a glimpse of small boys in white, playing cricket on a green square—an oddly exotic picture for those Scotsmen. So they came to the red rocks of Devon and the blue of the Channel seas.

"We'll be at Dover soon," observed Deveney knowledgeably.

They hung from the windows and cheered. But it was to Devonport they came at last. For two hours under a broiling sun they were shunted mercilessly about that town, until their train ran under the shadow of a great ship by the quay. With the interest of specialists they studied the form of that great, grey vessel.

"Crivvens alive! It's the old *Alsatia*," cried Deveney at last, in an ecstasy of sudden recognition, "I built the flakin' ship masel'!"

And men in every carriage recognised with joy a ship they had helped to build on the shores of Clyde. Now she was to carry them to war. As they were shepherded on board, down steep companions and along faintly-lighted alleyways, men touched stanchions, rails and plates and swore to have put them where they were.

"This auld yin'll no'sink on us," Deveney declared. "I plated her masel'."

Most of them slept through the afternoon. The private soldier had no burning passion for fresh air.

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He preferred the fug of his sleeping quarters and slumber among his huddled companions. He could sleep anywhere. That he was in a situation extremely novel and interesting, in a berth far below the Plimsoll mark of a troopship, entirely failed to excite such as Deveney. There were men of that battalion who, throughout the voyage, did not appear on deck save when duty called. They slept and played foolish games of cards in the bowels of the ship that bore them over foreign waters.

But every man was on deck when, after sunset, two destroyers slipped to position at the mouth of the harbour. A soft golden light was over the pool, and the piled tiers of houses were lovely above the still water. A launch dashed among the shipping and approached the transport. In the bow stood a man with a megaphone.

"*Alsatia* ahoy!" he cried. Then, grandiloquently: "I am the King's Harbourmaster."

From a hundred rude Scottish throats came a burst of sardonic laughter. Deveney answered the hail.

"Who's arguin' wi' ye, then?"

But naval pomp could subdue those vulgar souls. Men fell silent as the ship nosed out between the headlands into the Channel. They felt the wonder of the endless miles of empty sea before them; they knew that awful chances lay before them on the bleak wastes of the Atlantic and at the journey's end. One cannot without emotion watch the shores of home fade into purple shadow behind. There is a thrill irresistible in the lift of a ponderous hull to the swell that rolls up from the ocean.

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"Well, chaps," said Deveney at last, and his voice, for once, was subdued. "We're aff right enough now."

Leaving the matter of their safety to the restless destroyers that kept unwavering position on the beams, one by one they went below.

It was fresh morning when they wakened, with the sun bright on the waves. A sou'westerly breeze blew cheerfully, and white gulls still followed them. It seemed as if the destroyers had been there always, so steadily did they keep position. There they remained, just ahead of the ship, until about noon the gaunt headland of Ushant showed up on the port bow. It was as if the destroyers then wakened into life. Up fluttered a signal on the halyards of one. Simultaneously they wheeled away from the *Alsatia* and, turning about, raced away at top speed for home.

"Some folks has a' the luck," said Deveney.

But he did not stay on deck to look after them. Sun helmets had been issued that morning, and now the soldiers had to face the difficulties of winding puggarees. This Deveney preferred to do in the heat of his berth below. The Bay of Biscay did not disturb his task with any of the traditional tempests. At night they ran into fog. In the evening of the following day Deveney was called on deck to see the impressive shadow of Gibraltar in the haze ahead.

"Crivvens!" he said. "It's terrible like Dumbarton Rock."

And so they came into the Mediterranean, absurdly blue, and lazed all day on the hatch-covers under the warm sun. There were some mild duties to perform. Men were on guard as usual, some of

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them on anxious look-out for periscopes, and occasionally young officers gave fatuous lectures on the science of trench-warfare. Twice they were turned out in an alarming fashion for boat-drill. On both occasions it was half-an-hour after the siren had belled that Col found the boat to which he was allocated. For the rest, the men slept, some on the hatch-covers, most far below in their narrow berths. Or they played noisy games of Nap or House. They were magnificently incurious as to the progress of their enterprise.

The parched, rocky island of Gozo they passed at noon one day. An hour later they came to Malta, and the bells rang in the engine-room. Slowly the ship made the lovely harbour of Valetta, gliding past French warships that carried cows on their decks. Lithe boys rowed out and dived for silver coins, and subtle merchants chattered from feluccas with Scots heads thrust through portholes. From one of these Col purchased a filmy scarf of gauze.

"God help us, Col!" said Deveney. "Hev ye a lassie in Constantinople?"

But it was Deveney who bought it back from Col, in order that he might send a present to Bella, lonely in Inchgreen.

They stayed there overnight, and the sun went down, and comfortable lights came out on the white tiers of houses above the harbour. There was a concert in the well-deck in the gloaming, and Valetta heard the sentimental songs the British soldier loves. Clearly the voices rang across the calm and ghostly waters of the harbour.

The hours I spent with thee, dear heart—

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Or even more flamboyantly :

Orynthia, my beloved !

"Gees, it would break yer heart !" said Harry Barley sincerely. It occurred to many of them to think that, if this was their destination, they might have done worse.

But they were out of sight of land before they wakened next morning, and it was not till two days later, shortly after the lilac sunrise, that men on watch saw above the levels of the sea a faint, flat strip of sand diversified here and there by the silhouette of a palm. Deveney was called on deck to witness this mysterious landfall.

"Whaur the hell are we noo ? " he demanded to know.

The ship steamed at length into the harbour of Alexandria, and for a moment the men were stirred by the exotic. They smelled the musky smells of the Orient, looked down on grinning brown faces upturned from bumboats, shaded their eyes from the glare of African sunlight on buildings dazzlingly white. They could see that people moved about on shore in garments of an unusual kind—Europeans in white, natives in long robes like nightshirts, the Egyptian women in flowing black robes with veils over their mouths. The red tarbush on every second head amused them ; it reminded them of pantomime. Alexandria, indeed, was for those Scottish soldiers an eminently theatrical spectacle.

They had violent altercations with the eager merchants of the bumboats, roared at them in coarse Clydeside Scots, and were indignant when Greek or Cypriote failed to understand their argot. From

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that pastime they were distracted by the arrival alongside of coal-barges, manned by Berbers of amazing blackness. As these grinning giants toiled up and down planks with great baskets of coal on their glistening backs, technical jests were showered on them from above.

"Whit pay d'ye get, mate?"

"Hev ye paid yer sub to the Union, Moses?"

"Hurry up, Sambo, or I'll put the gaffer on to you!"

They could not confess to surprise, these soldiers. They were British and self-contained. Foreigners for them could be no more than figures of fun and without reality. Most of them slept below throughout the afternoon, indifferent to the interest of that polychromatic sea-front. At sunset a working-party was sent ashore to handle stores. With it went Col and John and Deveney. They stepped on to the quay to see a devout Moslem issue from a house, his praying-mat in his hand. With eyes wide open they watched him spread the mat, kneel upon it, and bend low towards the City of the Prophet.

"Jings, chaps!" said Deveney hopefully. "This block's goin' to dae tricks."

It did not distress them that, in the brief and lovely twilight of the East, the ship weighed anchor and nosed out to sea again. It seemed that no environment, however startling, could interest them. Their lives and minds were narrow; they asked but food and sleep and, when it could be got, the relaxation of drink. They would have played Nap in the shadow of the Sphinx. Now, as the ship sailed North, they debated down below their destination. It began to dawn on them as a practical

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certainly that Gallipoli was their goal. Their few doubts were due entirely to the general haziness of geographical knowledge.

They saw the hills and cliffs of Crete next day, a lonely isle in the empty sunlight, and then they sailed among the islands of the Archipelago, golden brown piles in a sea of blazing blue. ("Gey like the Cumbraes," said Deveney). It was a cruise of rapturous beauty among the Cyclades, past Santorin and Nio and Amorgos, with their golden slopes and their white goats and the sage-green of their olives. Past Naxos they sailed, but the memory of Ariadne troubled the soldiers not at all. It was afternoon, and most of them had gone below to sleep. On the deck that the officers used, the metallic voice of a gramophone affronted the sacred seas.

*Gilbert—the Filbert.
The Knut with a K ;
The Pride of Piccadilly,
A blasé roué*

A machine-gun detachment blazed away all afternoon at bottles and boxes thrown into the sparkling blue. In the well-deck, a noisy party roared over a game of House. The golden sun of evening glowed on the slopes of Skyros, but they did not know, and they would not have cared had they known, that its sloping beams fell on the new-turned grave of Rupert Brooke.

Their excitements were of a different order. An aeroplane passed above them, having swooped as if to examine the ship, and men stood by with loaded rifles until they saw clearly on the yellow wings the

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red and blue circles of the Allies. And past the ship on the strong tides out of the Marmora floated dead mules, pathetic victims of war. Bloated with gas, they floated belly-upwards, their four legs stiff and ludicrous in the air. The submarine look-outs were doubled.

As they sailed that night through the Aegean they saw in the darkness ahead the fine silver pencils of searchlights sweep the vault of the purple sky. Men crowded on the fo'c'sle and swore to each other that they could hear the distant boom of guns. A soldier who thoughtlessly lit a cigarette in the well-deck was pounced upon and clapped under arrest for showing naked lights. The sleep of many was broken in the early morning by the clang of bells in the engine-room, the scuttle of sailors' feet on the deck, and the threshing of the screw reversed. The clatter of the anchor chains through the hawse-holes wakened every man to an awed and restless sense of arrival.

They were on deck early. The bright sun shone on a wide harbour packed with shipping—with the shapely hulls of Cunard and Anchor and Atlantic Transport liners; with drifters from the seas of the North; with bulky French battleships; with the squat, stout ships of Holt; with barges, lighters, and small craft of a dozen kinds; with turret-ships, destroyers, submarines, tenders, tugs, hoppers, and an absurd five-funnelled cruiser from Russia. It seemed as if the Seven Seas had been scoured that a naval museum might be assembled in this Aegean bay. To the soldiers from Clydeside, specialists in shipping, the assembly was of amazing interest. They leaned on the bulwarks of the *Alsatia* and

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debated hotly. They competed in reminiscences of the building of many of those ships.

From high quarters there drifted down the information that they had arrived at Lemnos—a barren, unfriendly island as viewed from the water. The slopes above the shores were covered with tents, and above most of the groups of tents floated the flag of the Red Cross. Hospitals. The thought was a little chilling. They began to hear from the sailors dark tales of sickness. The Mediterranean Expeditionary Force did not brood on wounds. It was the spectre of dysentery that haunted it. One gathered that thousands of men were on shore there, racked and weakened by dysentery. Old soldiers offered graphic description of the symptoms.

But the darkest tales of war could not seriously daunt those eager newcomers. To every grey launch that passed their anchored ship they shouted in unison:

“Are we downhearted?”

And answered their own question with a crashing monosyllable:

“No!”

From one of the launches came a solitary ironic voice:

“—But you bloody soon will be.”

They laughed at that fantastic wit. They could not yet envisage the possibility of failure.

The day passed slowly. Launches darted here and there across the bay, and now and again the boom at the harbour mouth swung open to let in a battered drifter, weary from hours of sweeping in the Straits. They cheered a submarine that passed out swiftly, and in the evening watched a string of barges glide

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away at the tail of a tug. But it seemed that the battalion would move no further that day. Rumour brought a story that they were to lie in Lemnos for at least a week.

Col and John went below to sleep long before First Post, but they were roused again as the wail of Lights Out drifted across the water from the camps ashore. Col stirred to see the grinning face of his ancient enemy, Corporal Lowrie, above him.

"Come on, now! Turn out!" snapped that hated voice. "Ye're wanted for a job of work."

The Corporal watched them stretch from their bunks.

"Youse blocks are for it now," he chuckled.

It was as if he gloated over their imminent deaths. It seemed to please him that Col was now to approach danger. But he did not explain the summons.

"Up to No. 2 hatch wi' ye! Come on, now! And keep yer mouths shut or ye'll get shot."

They hurried on deck to where the open hatchway gaped black in the night. They saw, drawn up by the rails on both sides, two companies of the battalion B and C. These ranks stood silent, equipped and armed for the field. From the hold swung boxes of ammunition.

Somebody dropped one of the oblong boxes at Col's feet.

"Take that."

A sergeant of B Company gripped his arm and whispered hoarsely:

"Come along here."

Col saw that his comrades, silent under the stars, packed their pouches with cartridges, 150 to each man. As he worked, he observed in a dim sort of

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way that a destroyer had slipped alongside the *Alsatia*. She carried no lights, and while Col paused for a moment to look down into one of her broad, fuming funnels, he heard Deveney whisper in his ear:

"We're to go as soon as these blocks get away."

About him in the shadows officers and N.C.O.s whispered portentously.

CHAPTER X

THE narrow steel decks of the destroyer *Bulldog* were packed uncomfortably with four hundred soldiers fully armed and equipped. As the little ship dropped away from the sheer side of the *Alsatia*, the sailors running to stations tripped over rifles and packs and feet. As Deveney remarked, the expedition had the air of a Fair Saturday trip on a Clyde pleasure-steamer. It had all that atmosphere of being a hastily-improvised and amateurish outing on an inadequate vessel. The men were inclined to crack jokes as the slim ship moved under the dim stars through the open gate in the boom. The voice of the commander cursed them violently from the bridge.

Clear of the harbour, the destroyer swung northwards. The passengers felt her bows lift and the stern settle as speed was cracked on by the humming engines. It was quite a new sensation, this awareness of high speed. One seemed to be so near the black water. The wash rose so violently behind the screws, an angry white in the darkness.

"She's doin' thirty, this wee yin," Deveney whispered appreciatively in Col's ear.

It was as if the *Bulldog* and her crew were anxious to hurl them forthwith into the strife ahead. The hull vibrated beneath their feet. Men became

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aware of the inevitability of this last step on their journey to the Front.

They were silent for the most part. Some inveterately sociable characters had made friends with the sailors and were sharing mugs of cocoa at the galley-door. The rest leaned on their rifles and peered into the darkness ahead. Now and again they exchanged restless, inconclusive whispers. But it was supremely the moment of self-communion. One wondered. It was eerie, this purposeful speeding through the night to foreign shores; and men asked themselves—what next? They fingered the hard packages of ammunition in their pouches.

For a time they saw nothing beyond the ship but the oily seas swinging past. A film of cloud rolled over the stars, and a skiff of rain swept down upon them. It was Col, standing with John under the bridge, who first saw with his tinker's eyes the ghost of a glimmer in the blackness ahead. It looked at first like an ever-so-distant flash of sheet lightning. Then, as the ship swept on, it seemed to steady into a faint incandescent glow. The glow resolved itself at last into a series of fine white lines of light, rising and falling like rockets. Soon the eye of every soldier on the *Bulldog* was fixed in dumb surmise on the monotonous barrage of star-shells curving over No Man's Land on the peninsula ahead. It appeared to them from the sea that the trenches had been raised somehow into mid-air. They stared at those restless lights.

They saw the lights before they heard the guns. Most noises were lost in the thresh of the ship through the waves. But as the long line of lights restored to them the sense of distance, their ears picked out

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from the rushing noises of their passage a flat, occasional boom. Soon they saw that those thuds could be related to bright flashes that stabbed the darkness now and again. The guns A rustle of whispering spread over the decks.

"Stop talking, there!" commanded the subdued voice of an officer.

There were not many guns on Gallipoli, however, and not many shells, and those sombre thuds were few and far between. Soon another crisper noise was distinguishable above the sounds of the sea. This was a thin, faint crackling, as if a gang of errand-boys drew sticks along distant area-railings. The soldiers were hearing for the first time the fatuous fusillade with which the Turk entrenched was wont to keep up his spirits from dark till dawn. As the *Bulldog* came under the lee of the Cape, now black before them, they heard from afar the venomous stutter of machine-guns. It brought a lump to one's throat.

A bell clanged in the engine-room below. The glimmer of star-shells disappeared as the ship slipped under a bluff of land. In a trice, as it seemed, the amazing technical dexterity of the Royal Navy had brought the *Bulldog* to rest alongside the hull of a stranded ship. When Col recovered from his surprise, he saw that B Company was being led from the starboard side through a black gateway cut in the rusty side of the hulk. Then he heard the lance-corporal of his section announce in a whisper that they had been detailed to clear the destroyer's deck of battalion stores.

It seemed but a minute before the ship had rid itself of its passengers. In a state of blank confusion

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Col found himself bundling packages from the *Bulldog's* deck on to a barge alongside, while a naval officer followed him about in a sort of suppressed frenzy.

"Take your bloody boxes off my ship," he whispered fiercely. "Take your bloody boxes off my ship."

Col stared meekly at the infuriated mariner. He was dragged on to the barge. The destroyer slipped out of sight.

"That's that," said Deveney cheerfully.

The little party went through the hole into the dark alleyways of the stranded ship. It became apparent that the lance-corporal was at a loss what to do next. They blundered along through the bowels of the derelict, their footfalls echoing through the empty hull, and up companion-ways. At last they reached the deck. Of the battalion they could see nothing; the shore, now visible under the starlight, was empty. Back along the deck they went and saw a faint gleam of candlelight under the door of what had been the chart-room of this ghostly vessel. As they entered, a corporal of the A.S.C., stretched on a settee, opened his heavy eyes.

"Hullo, chums!" he said incuriously. "Just arrived?"

Then he turned over and went to sleep again.

"Ach, we might as well doss it out, too," said Deveney.

They slept till dawn. A staff officer peeping into the crowded chart-room wakened them then. He smiled kindly on the confusion of the lance-corporal.

"You boys had better join your battalion," he said. "You'll find 'em at Pink Farm."

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They filed out on deck, rubbing their eyes, and looked about them. Deveney's eye was caught by a tarnished brass-plate beneath the bridge.

"'River Clyde'," he read out slowly: "'Russell & Co., Port Glasgow'."

He looked at his companions.

"Jings!" he said, as one who encounters mystery. "I'll bate ye ma old father was at the buildin' o' her."

The voice of the staff-officer broke in, more crisply now.

"Get along now, you lads. And when you get to the top there, keep well spread out."

The little party found its way through the dark decks of the *River Clyde* and set foot at last on V Beach. Just here, two months before, the water had been stained by gallons of blood. In the shallows had hundreds of bodies swayed to the touch of the tides, while the surface of the water boiled under the lash of machine-gun bullets. But now the little cove was empty and desolate. Above them, a battered, dead fort and an overturned gun were silhouetted against the grey sky of the morning. To their right, the Straits were grey and calm, with two drifters sweeping slowly against the current. The Asiatic shore was but a shadow through the mist.

"Aye, but whaur's Pink Farm?" asked the lance-corporal disconsolately.

They climbed a rough track that led out of the cove to the edge of the plateau. There they stood in a bunch beside the ruined gun, and stared in silence across the terrain of war. From the ruins on the right a rough voice came to startle them.

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"For God's sake, don't stand there in a lump. Scatter, you blasted idiots!"

"It's all dam' fine" the Corporal began to grumble.

He was interrupted by the shriek of a projectile that passed close above his head and burst about a hundred yards beyond. That vicious explosion, shattering the morning calm, was followed by the thud of the piece that had fired the shell across the Straits. They had made acquaintance with that famous gun of high velocity, Asiatic Annie. They scattered rapidly, and in a straggling, fan-shaped line moved slowly across the plain.

They saw as they went the little triangle of ground to which they were to be confined until—until they left it on stretchers if they were ever to leave it. It was a plateau that dipped slightly from the Cape and rose, but a mile or two ahead, to a barrier of hills across the peninsula. That solid ridge culminated in the central peak of Achi Baba. It was not, for newcomers and from the Cape, a formidable hill.

"Holy Mike!" cried Deveney to his companions. "Is that the bit hill they want us to take!"

Deveney did not realise that from the summit of Achi Baba the observer looked down on every foot of the British sector as on the stage of a theatre from the gallery.

The peace of the morning was certainly surprising. From the trench-line came only an occasional shot. The smoke of morning fires rose straight and homely in the still air. Here and there a cloud of dust swirled from under the wheels of hurrying limber-wagons. They saw something like a procession of tiny carts driven furiously by Indians down the white road

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along the edge of the western cliff. The white domes of tents among trees struck an odd note of festivity in the significance of the landscape. The sun broke through and brought out the glare of Gallipoli's white boulder-clay. It shone on the biscuit tins which, stuck in the parados of the trenches, made ranging-marks for the guns. It lighted up the rows of white crosses in a cemetery on the eastern skyline.

They began to feel the heat of the sub-tropics, to know the agony of the eyes that a steady glare on white sand sets up. As they came towards the area of the rest-camps, the heather on which they had been marching thinned out and gave place to bare patches of burning earth, intersected by soft dusty paths. They encountered long lines of shallow trenches, in which men slept under improvised canopies of waterproof sheets. Often they paused to ask their way.

"Straight on for Pink Farm," was the monotonous answer, "and for God's sake keep well spread out!"

It was the mournful shibboleth of men who lived continuously under shell-fire. But nothing further was aimed at the little party that moved across the plateau. Once or twice a gun boomed from the ravines of Achi Baba, and a shell droned high above on its leisurely way towards the beaches. They listened for the burst and went on, while the quick Seventy Fives of the French rapped out a salvo in reply. Then silence would fall again and the drone of insects reassert itself. It seemed a casual sort of war.

But there were those white crosses against the

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eastern skyline and, on the western shoulder of Achi Baba, the battered ruins of the hamlet that had once been Krithia, like the hollow tooth of a giant on the dusty slopes.

As they approached the base of the hill the trees became more numerous. They passed field hospitals, precariously secure under the Red Cross. Here they saw where a battery was concealed in an orchard. There they stumbled on the dug-out of an elderly quartermaster. Of Pink Farm they could see no trace. They looked for a solid white building. All they saw at length was their Company Sergeant-Major gesticulating on the track ahead.

"Here you are, boys!" he cried. "Keep well spread out!"

"Jings! Are we to keep spread out for the rest of our natural?" grumbled Deveney.

Moving in straggling file, they were led towards the first of four shallow trenches, white gashes in the baked clay.

"This is A Company's line," said the C.S.M.

They stepped over the bodies of their comrades, asleep in the sun, till they found an empty space in the burrow that was to be their home. Quickly they dropped their packs and rifles.

Deveney looked disconsolately about him.

"Pink Farm!" he said. "It's a hell of a fine farm, right enough."

But these rough men were creatures of amazing adaptability. They had humour and could suffer without protest. Col and his friends lay down on the baked earth and disposed themselves to await what might happen next. For an hour or two they slept. They did not know quite where they were, nor what

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day of the week it was, nor yet what hour of the day—but they slept. There was no movement about the camp to keep them awake in the heat of the sun. Already they had accepted the booming of the guns, the clatter of limber-wagons, and the drone of aeroplanes as features of a commonplace environment.

They were wakened after noon for a meal. It was a queer menu that the authorities had selected for troops in the sub-tropics—bread and apricot jam. They were to find that these comestibles formed the staples of life on Gallipoli; troops in Flanders jested about plum-and-apple jam, but it was seldom on Helles that the commissariat produced anything but that sweet and sticky medley of apricot and glucose.

“How could ye be doin’ wi’ a pint of beer, Loonie?” asked Deveney jocularly when the meal was done.

The quality of the food, however, was hardly thought of. In Gallipoli a meal resolved itself into a contest with buzzing swarms of flies, an intrepid myriad of insects that swept in black clouds on everything edible. They were not the house-flies of temperate zones, but coarse brutes with long wings and iridescent bodies of blue and gold. It seemed that they bred in millions every hour. They constituted a plague, a torture that could drive weary men to the point of insanity. The soldier learned quickly that the flies which shared his bread and gathered in festering clots on his jam had paddled first in the eyes of dead men and swarmed in the filth of the latrines. And that was why the hospitals of Lemnos and Egypt were crowded out with cases of dysentery.

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The flies dominated that field of war. The soldier had to learn as part of his science a way of fighting them. A scrap of mosquito netting covered the jam-pot. The bread was spread under a rag of the fabric. The net went with every bite to the mouth. But it was impossible to avoid swallowing flies now and again.

"Come on an' wash oot yer mooth," said Deveney to Col when their first meal on Gallipoli was over.

They ambled over towards the water-cart that lay at the end of the lines. There was an old well beside it, but a board on the coping proffered a stern warning to the thirsty. They filled their pannikins at the sluggish taps of the cart.

"Here's luck, Loonie!" said Deveney.

Then, violently, he spat out the draught and retched. His contorted face turned on Col's.

"O Gees!" he cried. "It's like drinkin' oot the wife's wash-tub."

Another little necessity of war. The water was tepid and impregnated with chloride of lime. Col and Deveney strolled back to lie down. There was nothing else to do. They slept fitfully.

The afternoon passed slowly. Always there sounded about them, till the ear failed to notice it, the drone of the foraging flies. Occasionally a shell boomed overhead towards the beach. From the line came the monotonous cracks of the snipers' rifles, then a splutter of machine-gun fire, faint in the heavy warmth of the afternoon, and then silence till some assiduous sharpshooter fired again. A monitor was firing from below the western cliffs. It was the thudding of its heavy guns that wakened the sleepers; the great shells crashed as if deliberately

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on the Turkish positions. War—but it seemed that afternoon a half-hearted sort of business.

Down the track that ran beside the battalion lines there passed now and again a little group that bore a stretcher to the field hospital in the grove behind. Sometimes the bearers chanted as they went, like priests singing a mournful office :

*Old soldiers never die,
Never die, never die !
Old soldiers never die—
They fade away !*

But sometimes the stretcher-bearers hurried along in silence, and once a drummer ran back from the latrines to A Company's line with a white scared face, shouting hysterically as he came.

" There's a block wi' his jaw blown aff ! There's a block wi' his jaw blown aff ! "

He was rudely suppressed by older men.

" Shut yer mooth or you'll get your jaw blown aff too."

It was a necessity for men to defend themselves against pity and emotion in the field.

Towards evening the Battalion enjoyed an excitement of its own. Suddenly, from the clearing in which Harry Barley had built his ovens of clay, there came a squeal. Men jumped to their feet and saw a man writhing on the ground. It was Deveney who darted forward first, while the great voice of the Sergeant-Major roared at the rest to lie down again. They saw the adjutant and the doctor run from beneath a tree towards the fallen man. Two R.A.M.C. orderlies trotted out with a stretcher.

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With uncomfortable lumps in their throats, men watched that isolated group. Then Deveney came running back, shouting hilariously.

"Harry Barley's got a bullet in the backside! Harry Barley's got a bullet in the backside!"

It was for Deveney a tremendous jest, and the battalion roared appreciatively. For it was the ludicrous fate of Harry Barley to have bent over his oven and received in the hip a spent bullet from the firing line. They carried him back to the field hospital.

"Old soldiers never die," they sang lugubriously as they went. They had picked up the idiom so soon.

It was not the last of the evening's excitements. When the sun was dipping down to the West in a blaze of gold above the blue peaks of Samothrace, there came to A Company's line the young commander of No. 1 Platoon. He came with permission from the Colonel to lead a small party to bathe off Y Beach below the western cliffs. Col and John and Deveney were among the successful applicants. In groups of threes they made their way among the huddled rest-camps and came out on the white road by the shining sea.

The evening peace was on Helles. Only an occasional wagon rattled up the road, its Indian driver chanting like a child. Hardly a rifle cracked from the firing-line, and the guns were silent. It was as if the spirit of kindness had come upon the warring armies with the soft golden light of the dying day. The spirit of holiday was on the bathing party. It was joy to be out of the dusty rest-camp, to be going down to plunge dusty bodies in the sunlit sea. They

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shouted and laughed as they scrambled down the steep paths to the beach. And what relief to throw off the heavy kilts and tip-toe over the flat stones into the cool Mediterranean !

They were out of sight down there, far away from the dusty plateau and the scarred hills. They larked uproariously in the water, as if they were safe in some sequestered bay of the Firth of Clyde. The war, and the feeling of war, had miraculously evaporated, leaving them free. They ventured, those who could swim, farther and farther from the shore.

Then with ghastly suddenness the War came upon them. There was a shriek in the air above them, and a fiendish crack The water was lashed by bullets. Their platoon-sergeant squealed and disappeared. A watchful observer on Achi Baba had marked the crossing of the little party and chanced a round of shrapnel over the beach. The evening peace of the battlefield was ever false.

The sergeant was not dead. He came up again, struggling, and two strong swimmers seized him. Again he shrieked, for rough hands grasped him where the round bullet had struck into the shoulder-blade. His blood made a faint stain in the water and smeared his hairy chest. But they were quick to bundle him ashore, where the young officer stood with a white, scared face, ready to clap on the first field dressing.

"Blighty for you, sergeant," said one man jocularly, and the wounded man smiled faintly. Two others had dressed rapidly and stood ready to carry him up the path. As the little procession moved away, Deveney stared after it.

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"It gives ye a funny kind of feeling in the guts all the same," he admitted.

But still they slept perfectly in the shallow trenches, the starry sky above them. As the glow died away in the sky behind the islands and dusk came over the trees, the crackle of rifle-fire in the trenches came up like the evening song of the night-jar. A chill little wind blew up the Straits, and men gathered the brown blankets about them. Soon it was dark enough for them to see the faint glare of the star-shells and the occasional flash of an angry gun. Yet the feeling of peace was about. In a coppice behind, the crew of a howitzer sang to the drone of a melodeon the songs of vaudeville they had learned in the music-halls of Wigan and Rochdale, songs that were banal and yet borrowed a sad beauty from the night. Off the Cape blazed the green and red lights of a hospital-ship.

Sleep came easily, but the newcomers had to stir frequently through the night. Once a crash from the howitzer in the orchard behind made men sit up, their eyes staring, lumps in their throats. Or the chill wind of darkness searched through the blankets to make the soldier blink for a moment at the stars and draw the clothes about him. Col was wakened that night by a little cry, like the feeble yelp of a dreaming puppy, from the boy who lay beside him. He concluded that his comrade cried in a dream, and turned over to sleep once more.

The camp stirred when the sun rose over Asia. Deveney was first on his feet, and he ran about in little circles, raising his knees high to quicken the circulation.

"Come on, youse blocks!" he cried to his friends.

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At a touch of his toe, Col sat upright and rubbed his eyes. Deveney passed on to the boy who had cried in the night and kicked his leg.

"Come on, chum. Jump to it."

Then his face steadied in a stare. There was something odd about the boy's attitude. His right shoulder was twisted a little, as if by a spasm of pain, and his young face was white and pinched.

"Charlie" Deveney called the boy by name.

But Charlie did not stir. Deveney turned to Col. "This wee fella's deid," he said.

He turned and ran towards the officers' lines. Col and John bent over that wistful white face. Gently they lifted back the blanket. Through the boy's shirt, above the heart, something had bored a neat hole. There was a little blue puncture in the skin below. The absence of blood was eerie.

The doctor and the adjutant, half-dressed, came running with Deveney at their heels. They knelt by the body.

"Dead for hours," said the doctor crisply. "Stray bullet."

He exchanged a look with the adjutant. They were moved—the boy was so young, a drummer of eighteen—but they dared not show emotion.

"Wrap him in his blankets and carry him under that tree over there," the doctor ordered.

The officers walked towards the Colonel, who had emerged from his dug-out. Behind them, there ran along the lines a swift whisper of bad news. Col and John brought up a stretcher. Deveney had wrapped the blankets about the body that had now no need of them. They lifted it on to the

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stretcher. Col and John stooped and raised the bier. For a moment they paused. With a little gesture, awkward but miraculously reverent, Deveney covered the pinched, white face with a fold of the blanket.

"He wis a nice wee fella," he said.

Under that tree the brown bundle lay all day, and no one approached it. It was as if a piece of war's refuse had been forgotten. But the sense of its nearness and of its significance was upon the camp. A bathing-party went off to the Beach; one whole company moved down to Lancashire Landing to handle stores; for the rest were found a score of duties about the camp. The battalion had been blooded, but it did not that day recover altogether from the shock. Men muttered to each other a fervent wish that they would bury Charlie Dodds and be done with it.

It was not till late evening, however, that a party was set to hack out in the boulder-clay beneath a thorn-bush a grave for the first casualty. While they worked, Deveney begged from the cooks a wooden box and from the Q.M. stores a hammer and nail. He was seen heating an iron in the cookhouse fires. When the time came, the grave of Charlie Dodds did not lack a cross with his name and number branded on it.

Col and Deveney represented the platoon at that pathetic burial. Only a little party listened to the grave voice of the Padre reading the great words over the bundle of brown blanket. The rest lay silent in the shallow trenches. Otherwise the obsequies of Charlie Dodds would have brought the shrapnel shrieking over Pink Farm.

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It was Deveney who shovelled the first spadeful of white earth into the grave.

"Ach," he said bitterly when Col and he were left alone to complete the work, "it's damned silly when ye come to think of it."

Then they hurried to finish the job. They were still working when the C.S.M. bustled up.

"Quick now, boys! We've got to be ready for the line at dusk to-night."

They understood very well that there was to be no rest for them till they followed Charlie Dodds at least a part of the way.

CHAPTER XI

HUMAN movement on Helles was furtive. Stores and troops came by night and were, by a slow and wearisome process, distributed in penny numbers. Limber-wagons could run the gauntlet for three miles from the Cape to the dumps, but from the barges to the loading-points and from the dumps to the trenches on the slopes, everything—food, water, stores and ammunition—had to be laboriously manhandled. It was marvellous that troops were ever landed on Gallipoli; it was infinitely more marvellous that the troops were fed and munitioned by those slow and archaic processes.

The observer on Achi Baba's peak dominated the situation. It took many hours to relieve a brigade in the line. The reliefs set out in daylight, and across the open country a battalion was strung out endlessly in slowly-moving groups.

"Keep well spread out!" yelled the subalterns incessantly, and sergeants echoed them.

So it went on through the afternoon till the units reassembled in the long communication trenches. Men were sick with thirst and fatigue long before they had completed those dreary journeys from the rest-camps to the shelter of the nullahs.

It was still light when A Company set out on its first trip to the firing line. The golden glow of sunset was over the peninsula, and the soldiers went

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slowly, in tiny groups that seemed to straggle aimlessly among the trees and ridges of the plateau. At the head of that serpentine trek, led by their platoon-commander and a corporal, went Col and John and Deveney, the spear-head of the battalion's adventure. They went along in silence, gagged by the sense of the unknown before them. Sometimes they paused while the young officer, his boyish brow wrinkled, looked from the blue print of a map to the hills ahead. Then they would go on again, slowly.

The soldiers did not know where they were going. It was not in such as Col to attempt the task of speculation ; he went because he was led. But even the sharper mind of Deveney took it on trust that the battalion was going to hold the trenches. He knew fairly clearly what that implied—endless vigilance, sniping, and an extremely confined existence. But the idea of fighting was welcome, better than loafing about the rest-camps, and he pictured hectic moments with the bayonet. That was a satisfactory thought.

"We're goin' to see a bit of fun now, lads," he whispered to Col and John.

They were going up to fight. Good. It made a man think, but it was satisfactory to be going somewhere. The question of their precise geographical destination did not interest them at all. How the divisions were disposed across the battle-front ; where the French lay ; what troops they were to relieve—these things did not trouble the mind of the private soldiers. They followed the boy officer. He, to be sure, was not at all clear as to the fate of the battalion as a whole. He knew only that his job was to steer the straggling column into the deep

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nullah that twisted behind Gurkha Bluff. And Gurkha Bluff was that nobbly, barren, sun-gilt hillock that lay ahead where the spur of Achi Baba ran down to the sea.

They went on. The sun set, gorgeous behind Samothrace, just such a glory of gold and purple as they had often seen above the Highland hills from the Craigs. That took a man's thoughts back home, perhaps to a bright tenement kitchen in Cartsdyke and to courting days on the moors above the town. But a man must not think of that sort of thing . . . They were distracted by a fierce outbreak of rifle-fire away on the right of the line towards Morto Bay. A local attack. Good luck to our boys, whoever they might be.

But that distant anger of musketry, absurdly out of place at the lovely hour of sunset, was disturbing to the thoughts. A man could not help thinking of the good fellows who were stopping some of those bullets ; he could not help seeing in imagination the queer throw of the body as it fell forward ; he could not help hearing the grunt of finality. Some of them, of course, would be wounded merely, and the stretchers would come up in time. It was queer to think that there was no leaving Gallipoli except on a stretcher.

The young officer spoke freely at last.

"Well, this seems to be the spot," he said. "We'll move up the road a bit and wait."

They had turned into a narrow glen with bleak precipitous sides of crumbling white clay. A dusty track ran upwards and wound out of sight. In the lee of the northern bluff stood a row of little carts with gawky mules in the shafts and Indian drivers,

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who grinned fraternally at the kilted men. High overhead an occasional bullet pinged loudly. Three wooden crosses stood awry against the wall of rock. Deveney and the corporal strolled across to study those symbols. On each, scrawled in indelible pencil, was a curt legend :

UNKNOWN SOLDIER

15/5/15.

To die was all very well—but to be unrecognised in death !

They sat down to await the coming of the battalion. Group after group turned at regular intervals into the nullah and fell out by the track, till the roadside was lined with armed men. There was little conversation and no laughter. The officers clustered together and compared watches, maps, instructions. It was an hour before the last section of D Company joined the rest in the glen. With them came the Colonel and his adjutant. They moved up to where Deveney, Col and John sat patiently on the ground. Like the rest they sat down to wait. The Colonel called softly to Deveney.

" Here, boy ! "

" Sir ! "

" Pass the word down that the men can smoke." He added in a mutter to the adjutant, " It'll be their last to-night, poor devils."

The glen was filled with flickering lights for a moment ; thereafter the dusk was pierced by the glowing ends of cigarettes. But still there was little conversation. Men were not at ease, waiting there while the darkness came down and the stars appeared

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above. They wanted very much to know for what they were waiting. An hour passed.

"It's cold," Deveney would say as the night breeze came up the nullah.

"Aye, it's cold," the corporal would agree.

But there was no heartiness in these desultory exchanges. They wanted to get on. Why couldn't they get on? It was a long time waiting. They felt oddly lost in this bleak nullah, like ignorant children playing a dangerous game in the dark. Some men were able to fall asleep. For the rest it was a matter of waiting while the slow minutes dragged along. It is not pleasant to have to wait in the darkness in a strange place for a move of which the nature cannot be conjectured.

There was little movement on the roadway to distract them. The little carts of the Indians had gone before the battalion was completely assembled. Now a signaller would hurry down the track on his way to some hidden headquarters; again a little party of sappers would trudge wearily up to their dark jobs in the trenches. Once or twice that night there passed through the darkness, silent, a group with a stretcher. The waiting men could hear that the firing-line was nervous. Above the monotonous crackle of musketry from the Turkish lines there rose frequently the harsh clatter of British machine-guns. A battery of eighteen-pounders somewhere to the southward was putting over its salvoes with a frequency unusual in Gallipoli.

"Sounds like dirty work up there!" grunted Deveney.

"Mebbe that's why we're kep' waiting," said the corporal.

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They were endlessly patient. Their patience was pathetic. They waited, reasoning from the clamour above that their time had not yet come. But the monotony was trying. They saw, too, that their colonel was restless. He rose frequently and walked the length of the battalion. Col and his friends heard him mutter impatiently to his adjutant.

"Will that damned guide never come ! They don't seem to know what they want"

And those who heard him were visited again by that queer feeling of being lost. It was often like that in the field—as if the movement of straggling units through a trench-system was really an affair beyond human control, as if the Staff trusted largely to luck. There seemed to be no taut plan about it all. Things just fell out more or less fortuitously.

It was after midnight before the relief from tension came. A tall figure came striding down the white track.

"Is that the Sixth Rosses ? " he asked in a sort of confidential tone. The Colonel's voice in reply sounded loud and nasal.

"It is. What about it ? "

Spurs clicked, and the stranger whispered. They heard the rustle of papers. A flash-lamp glowed, and its reflected light shone on a young face, the face of a boy, and on a red band round his hat. He wore elegant field-boots, and his uniform was of marvellously stylish cut. There was a bored sort of drawl in his tones.

"Right ! " said the Colonel at length, and the adjutant hastened down the line. The thousand men rose stiffly to their feet. A message came rustling through the files.

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"No smoking. No talking. Keep touch"

They moved off in the wake of the Colonel, Col. Deveney and John at the head of the battalion. Trustfully they went. Something was going to happen now. That flutter of maps had been reassuring. But it was slow going up the hill. The files straggled.

"Keep touch, there ! Keep touch !"

The almost agonised whisper passed up and down the line continually, till men were angered by the incessant reiteration. It was bad enough to be lugging full packs, rifles, and endless rounds of ammunition. Some staggered along under the weight of ammunition-boxes. Each company was responsible for a great camel-tank full of water, and men cursed those villainously heavy loads. Keep touch, indeed !

Soon the track and the gully narrowed and degenerated finally into a trench. Now they went in single file, slowly, ever so slowly into the intricacies of the trench-system. It was a little lighter here, and men saw the faces of their comrades ghoulishly lit up by the star-shells. Now the bullets whipped very close above their heads. Always up and up, on and on.

It was heavy going for all, sheer agony for those who carried loads. When they met a stretcher coming down, the wounded man had to be lifted high above their heads. Very still and silent and mysterious were those wounded men—except one, who babbled foolishness in a morphine dream. Then on again. The shuffle of feet on the hard floor of the trench became exasperating. They felt the white dust in their mouths, clotting the tongue.

At last the head of the column reached a sort of clearing. To right and left dark, empty trenches ran

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away into the unknown. Three other trenches radiated from this point to various parts of the Front. The young officer with the Colonel paused to study his maps, and the long line of men stuttered to a halt. It took a long time for their guide to make up his mind.

"Well, sir?" rapped the Colonel at length.

The young officer dived for one of the radiating trenches.

"This way, I think."

They started again, and the men with the camel-tanks groaned. This new trench was narrower than that through which they had come. It seemed to be leading them away towards the East. Here and there it was crossed by empty, crumbling, forsaken lines. Like walking through a derelict cemetery. Those at the head of the column saw the young officer slow down, hesitate, stop.

"I'm afraid, sir" he began apologetically.

The Colonel's voice was extremely loud and hard.

"You mean you've lost your way! And do you think I'm going to have my men butchered for your blasted incompetence."

It was sickening, humiliating. Their guide stammered.

"We'd better hurry back, sir."

No. 1 Platoon was left standing.

"And noo," said Deveney, "we'll have to wait till that young cock gets back to the other end o' the battalion. Hell of a fine officer, him!"

"Stop talking there!" hissed a sergeant.

They had to wait, and now below their patience ran a streak of irritation. They had the feeling of having been defrauded. All because a nincompoop of an

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amateur soldier did not know his job. It was nearly half an hour before they heard the sounds of slow movement behind and turned to follow in the tail of the battalion. They had to crawl again through a maze of trenches. Men lost all sense of direction and resigned themselves to boredom.

There were many halts. Messages came down the line, incoherent jumbles of words that had been sadly mangled in transmission. At last there reached the men in the rear a rumour that the head of the column was moving out into the open through a sap. It was not explained why they were doing so, but the news brought a strange thrill of anticipation. Always they shuffled along.

"Second hoose for the Hippodrome," whispered Deveney. "It's like the pit queue on a Setturday night."

"Stop talking, you blasted fool!" hissed the nervous subaltern.

Out of the communication trench they turned sharply to the left into a dark sap. They saw outlined against the starry sky the figure of the Colonel, standing on a step. Past him went lumps of black figures, crouching. It seemed as if they were being hoisted up and pushed out into the open. Somebody kept whispering a stock instruction.

"Keep down. Follow the tape. Dig yourself in like hell."

Col found himself punting Deveney over the parapet. Then he felt a hand under his own right foot. He drew himself up and plunged. Deveney, flat on his stomach, crawled before him along a white tape that had been laid on the ground. He followed the shining tackets on those large feet, stopped when

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they stopped, felt for his entrenching tool, and began to pick at the hard ground. The whine of bullets overhead urged him to unusual industry.

They were in it at last, well in it. The star-shells rose and fell above them, making arches of white fire over their heads. The crack of rifles sounded dangerously near at hand. Col had lost all sense of direction, but danger spurred his wits and, while he plied the miniature pick in his hand, he gathered a tolerably clear sense of the precariousness of his position. Immediately to the right, not a hundred yards away, a line of intermittent flashes marked the Turkish front line. To the left, the ground rose slightly to a blank crest. It became clear that the battalion lay along the face of a slope directly exposed to Turkish fire. That the line of diggers did not stand out plainly before the Turkish sentries seemed miraculous. Col waited for a bullet to drive into his side.

But it soon became plain that the rifle-fire was not directed at the diggers, that their deployment over the open had passed unobserved. The bullets screamed close overhead, some plunged into the earth very near at hand, but they were bullets casually aimed. It was astounding, and encouraging, that this sort of thing could be done, that star-shells should fail to reveal the obvious. Surely they must be spotted They dug industriously.

As the tiny parapets rose by their sides, men grew more confident and more methodical in their tasks. Inch by inch the baked white clay gave way before the industrious picks till each man had scraped a hollow that gave him at least the illusion of safety. They did not pause to look round. To do so was to

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realise again the stark danger of the job. It seemed that their officers had disappeared, that the men had been left out on the hillside to their own resources. The only thing to do was to dig. To what end they were digging not one among the thousand knew.

After an hour of it, Col was distracted from his task by a tiny flame that had begun to flicker on the ground to the right, not twenty yards away. An irrelevant little flame, it seemed, and he watched it with interest. The night breeze fanned it; it spread and rose. Finally it leapt high and large as if paraffin had been poured upon it. Col's eyes opened wide and stared at that strange conflagration; he felt a tightening at the throat. For it had become horribly clear that the bloated body of a dead man was on fire. Perhaps a bullet had struck a box of matches in a pocket There, at all events, lay the corpse in its bright pyre. The work of digging slackened all along the line.

Then Col saw a tall figure moving against that light, an officer of sappers strolling over nonchalantly to study the phenomenon. And suddenly the night was rent by a crash of musketry from the Turkish lines, rifles and machine-guns blazing fire and lead at the diggers. The tall officer disappeared in that blizzard of bullets. They saw him spin rapidly and fall. Then they forgot his swift fate in the terrible need to press their own bodies into the shallow hollows they had made. They had been spotted.

Col felt that he was about to die. It was impossible to believe that at least one of the bullets that cracked and whined about him would not bury itself in his body. It was a hail of bullets, shrieking over his back, lashing the earth about, and raising a fine

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cloud of white clay dust. The assault was incredibly fierce, damnably vicious in its suggestion of the hate of enemies. It was not within the scope of Col's intelligence to realise that fear is the chief motive of intensive rapid-fire. He imagined that the Turks were intoxicated with a triumphant desire to kill, and he felt in a vague way that it was unfair he should be lying exposed and helpless. The sooner the inevitable bullet hit him the better. He expected it to rip along his back and bury itself in his spine. Or it might come smack into the side of his head.

From these curiously calm preoccupations he was suddenly distracted by a squeal. Quickly he turned his eyes to the left and saw beside him a man who wriggled and plunged on the ground. The squeal developed into a gurgling whine, a sort of wet rattle that became monotonous. The man was in agony ; always he plunged about making those curious sounds. Col watched him with detachment. He realised that a sapper had been hit in the throat, but it did not at first occur to him that anything was to be done. The man must die, while the others pressed their faces into the earth. It was absurd, pitiful, indecent, this public agony of a frightened man ; but there it was.

Perhaps a minute elapsed before the pity of the thing dawned on Col. Then he became filled with the desire to help the poor fellow. It was the dawn of the emotion that men call heroism—which is nothing but man's indomitable instinct to rise to the practical needs of the moment. Col forgot the bullets. He jerked himself out of his hollow and crawled to where the sapper writhed and bubbled. Carefully he dragged him into the poor shelter of the little

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parapet his entrenching-tool had thrown up. There he lay and held a dirty handkerchief to the rent in the man's windpipe. The sapper held his disengaged hand in a grip of trustful gratitude. They lay together until Deveney crawled up from behind.

"Come on, Col," he whispered hoarsely, "we're to go in. Heave this block on to my back."

Deveney lay prone while Col hoisted the limp body of the sapper on to his friend's shoulder. They crawled slowly towards the sap. When they came to its black edge, strong hands reached out and pulled the wounded man into safety. He was hustled away on a stretcher. A hand fell on Deveney's back.

"Good lad! Well done!" said the voice of the Colonel.

"It wasna' me, sir. It was old Loonie here," and Col grinned sheepishly.

But the Colonel did not hear Deveney's explanation. The press of men, tumbling in from the open, had pushed them down the sap into the trench. Bravery did not matter quite so much as safety.

"Never mind, Loonie," said Deveney, cheerfully, "I'll see ye get yer medal a' right."

"Stop talking," hissed their platoon commander.

And Deveney wanted very much to talk. To have escaped safely from that blizzard of bullets was a miraculous relief that cried for expression. But they must not talk; they must submit themselves to the incalculable will of authority. They followed the young officer through the maze of the trenches. Whither he led them they did not know.

Now, however, it was easier going than when the battalion had groaned on its slow way towards the line. Now they moved downhill and could walk

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freely. Trenches are featureless ditches, but observant soldiers saw that they were returning whence they had come. They were not to go into the line after all. When they realized that, men let their tired minds and muscles relax, so that they walked in their sleep down the monotonous stretches of trench. As dawn was breaking, the first files came to the gully where they had lain the night before. They did not wait for orders but at once lay down to sleep.

Thus they slept till the hot sun shone into the nullah. The whole battalion had rested there through the morning hours. And now they wanted food and drink. The water-bottles were dry, the camel-tanks empty, and the thirst of Gallipoli was a terrible thirst. Men began to look for a well, and adventurous parties set off down the nullah. A roar from the Colonel brought them back. It appeared that they were to lie and wait until water came to them.

They waited for a long time, while the heat in the nullah grew heavy and sickening. Tongues seemed thick in the mouth ; the very founts of saliva were putrid with smoking. Still the water did not come ; still they were forbidden to seek it. It was marvellous that they waited so patiently and grumbled so little.

Food came to them first—and it was queer food to offer thirsty men from the stifling trenches : bully-beef, hard biscuits, cheese, apricot jam. The beef was salt, the sweetness of the jam repulsive, and the cheese stank. They only nibbled at the hard biscuits, and cursed and coughed when the dry clods of flour stuck in their throats. But still Deveney could make a joke of it, and they could all settle down, their heads on their packs, their tunics

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unbuttoned, to await the pleasure of their leaders. They slept again.

The hours passed. When men stirred and sat up to look along the line of soldiers against the white wall of the gully, they wondered why the battalion should be there, neither in the line nor out of it. It seemed silly that they should be lying there unwanted and yet not free. The Staff must have forgotten them—or was this really War? Some men thought darkly of the monotonous, interminable days that lay before them. It was useless to look to the officers for any hint of what was toward. They sat aloof and talked listlessly. Perhaps the officers knew no more than the men.

The sun rose till it was nearly overhead, then passed with deliberate slowness towards the West. The flies buzzed in thousands, battenning on the perspiration of the sleepers. Ceaselessly the random bullets pinged away overhead; only occasionally did a big gun speak. For five minutes the soldiers were amused to watch the feeble white puffs of shells about a soaring aeroplane. They ceased after a time to watch the thin traffic up and down the glen, and it did not now excite them in the least to see, passing downhill, a slowly-borne stretcher. Already it had been rumoured along the line that they had left seven of their comrades out on the barren hillside.

The afternoon dragged out, and evening came. By now they were nearly indifferent to what might happen next. But they stirred when a Staff officer came up the nullah and approached the group of officers. Anxiously they watched him address the Colonel; they studied the gestures of these two powerful beings. They saw that the Colonel was

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angry. Angrily he turned to his adjutant. The subalterns came running towards their platoons. Within a minute, Col. Deveney and John were moving down the nullah in the wake of their boy officer.

"All the same, sir," said Deveney respectfully, "they shouldn't ha' went and kep' us there a' day."

The subaltern smiled cynically and shrugged his shoulders. It was none of his business. It was always the business of somebody in authority. The chain of responsibility ran on and on—till it passed out of sight.

"Whose bloody business is it, then?" muttered Deveney to Col as they went straggling across the plateau towards Pink Farm. "Seems to me dam' like as if nobody knew. I wish some of those officer blocks would try goin' without water for a day or two."

He grumbled under his breath for a time, then added sardonically:

"It's a fine bloomin' War, right enough."

The novelty had worn off already.

He saw before him the prospect of extreme monotony.

CHAPTER XII

GOD-LIKE, the General Staff moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform. No doubt its tasks are difficult and complicated, but it does ask an amazing deal of patience from those who are the counters in its game of war.

The battalion had left the rest-camp, trudged to the front line, and returned to the rest-camp—all within twenty-four hours. Before another twenty-four hours had passed it was again on trek towards the trenches. Its apprenticeship in the art of war was now regarded as complete. It went with the brigade to take over a sector on the right of the line.

A Company did not on this occasion lead the way from Pink Farm. Fully-armed and equipped, the platoons lay under a hot sun in the open, shallow trenches while the other companies dribbled off in groups of fours and fives to make a long straggling line that wound away among the trees and scrub to the eastward. All the landscape shimmered in the heated air that rose from the baked white earth. The swarming flies, glorying in the forced impassivity of the waiting troops, buzzed in vile hordes above the lines. From the latrines there drifted over the camp a sickening stench. Hot puffs of wind carried dust in stifling waves that set men coughing. It was early afternoon, the hottest time of day. Men shrank from the thought of toiling and sweating up the narrow

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trenches. Meanwhile it was bad enough to have to lie supine, while the fierce sun scorched the thick khaki on the soldier's back and heated every piece of metal-work about his person. It became pain to move, for the skin of neck and knees was dry and burning. Soon the thresh of heavy kilts against hot, perspiring legs would set up agonising sores. They were glad in No. 1 Platoon to get going at last.

They had not far to go across the open, a mile at most, and there were trees to give shade from the sun and cover from the enemy. They passed emplacements of Seventy Fives, with bearded French gunners asleep beneath the trees. Here they saw a solemn ring of Indians in light khaki, squatting like so many Buddhas and rolling white eyes at the kilted troops. There was a signaller of the Naval Division asleep beneath a waterproof sheet craftily arranged. In a great square hole by the track stood four fine horses, twitching to the sting of the flies. And as they shuffled along they heard the faint strains of a brass band, playing on a ship in Morto Bay. Somebody remembered that it was Sunday afternoon. It was *Salut d'Amour* that the band played.

It seemed, indeed, that the atmosphere of the Sabbath had come down on the land. Few living things moved on the plateau save the straggling battalion. Hardly a rifle cracked in the line, and the guns were silent. The loudest noises were of shuffling feet and creaking equipment. Behind these faint noises there sounded continually the drone of insects in the trees.

"I expect," said Deveney, "I expect the Salvation Army band'll be waitin' for us roon' the corner."

But nobody capped his pleasantries. It was too hot

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for jesting. Men were obsessed by the discomforts of their sweating, overloaded bodies. The thing was to get on, to get on, until they should be allowed to rest again.

They came soon to the entrance to a great trench and passed into it. It was a wide trench, plainly built for mule traffic, and its hard floor made for easier walking. But now the eyes had no distraction from the hard glare of boulder clay. Trees and the faint grey-green of Achi Baba had disappeared; there was nothing but the brazen sky above, the blinding white of the trench walls round about. The men made acquaintances with another of Gallipoli's minor horrors—an agonising pain behind the eyes. For Col, with his pale blue eyes and his northern fairness, that steady glare of brilliant sunlight was maddening. He had to close his eyes, and the blindness made him stumble. It is unpleasant to stumble under the weight of a pack and a hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition. And now that the head of the battalion was feeling its way into the trench-system they halted often, so that men would blunder into the backs of those before them. Even the temper of Deveney began to fray, and he took to cursing the apparent futility of these tedious and painful treks about a blasted countryside.

They were nearly an hour in that broad trench, trudging slowly up the Kereves Dere. They had camel-tanks to carry, machine-guns, boxes of ammunition—all the cumbersome paraphernalia of war, but they congratulated themselves that the communication-trenches in this sector were reasonably broad. Then, suddenly, the trench led them out into the open again. They had not yet entered the

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trench-system proper. Now they were in the bed of a broad nullah ; a thin and reedy stream flowed by the track. There passed them a bronzed, smiling Frenchman with a series of frogs impaled on his slender bayonet. Above them on the left, the mildly curious faces of soldiers gazed at them from the black mouths of dug-outs. To the right, the slope was more gradual. There was a tree up there, and beneath it stood five white crosses, irregularly placed. They passed a board which bore the legend "Romano's Well."

"High bloomin' time," grumbled Deveney.

But they were not suffered to fall out and fill their water-bottles. The snakelike line came to a fold in the ground, which was marked by a double sign-board. "Oxford Street" said one blade, "Regent Street," the other. They followed the battalion up Regent Street. This was the communication-trench at last, and now the slow pain of the journey began in earnest.

They struggled on. The slope was now considerable, and Regent Street was narrow. It was possible to look back and see the Aegean shining in the distance, but few sought that relief. The thing was to go on, with eyes shut against the sun-glare, with sweat streaming down the bare legs. Men reached a point when a stumble meant agony. Those who laboured with the camel-tanks cursed angrily. Col and Deveney had to take a box of ammunition from a boy who wept for the vexation of its weight on his immature body. Then he wept still more bitterly for his failure to do the job he had been allotted.

So they came after a time to a broad trench that cut across Regent Street. They were to know it

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later as the Eski Line. Now they saw it occupied as a dressing-station. While they passed, a cheerful Marine was in the hands of the doctor and sought to wave his wounded leg at them.

"Good luck, boys!" he cried with the heartiness of one who had escaped for a time.

They could see along that trench the bare slopes of the hill, and they saw that it was dotted here and there with brown bundles, like worn-out sacks that had been cast aside. These things, they knew, were the corpses of men who had fallen in wild assaults on the implacable hill and still awaited burial. It made a man think, the sight of those bundles that had once been men drunk with the glory of the charge. It gave a new significance to the whip of the bullets overhead.

Then on into the monotony of Regent Street, until, late in the afternoon, they began to encounter the traffic of the trenches, to turn and twist past redoubts and barricades and strong points, and to be held up often while the leading companies slipped into their places in the line. In the end, No. 1. Platoon followed its young leader into the trench they were to occupy definitely.

The officer did not explain the significance of that trench. He did not tell them that they were in reserve, that B Company was in support, that C and D Companies were in the line. He did not mention that the Turks lay but three hundred yards away. Their job was to settle down and do what they were told, and these things they proceeded to do with the cheerful adaptability of their race. They were not, indeed, in the least curious as to their function in the tactical scheme of the sector. Their anxiety was to procure supplies of food and room to sleep.

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It was not at all a bad trench, for it had once been the Turkish front line. Now the lining of sand-bags had been removed save for a parapet next the enemy. The grey walls were of bare boulder-clay. Former occupants had scooped out cunning sleeping-places under the parapet and in the other wall had cut rough chimneys for their little fires. In places, that rear wall had been broken through, so that they could look down the slopes of the hill to the glowing sea and the distant Cape with the cluster of shipping about it. In the sleeping-places was shelter from the sun, and the broad firing-step afforded ample room for a man to rest at length.

It was Deveney who decided where he and Col and John were to live. They found one little bay that seemed designed for their peculiar needs. With enthusiasm Deveney supervised the rigging of waterproof sheets for shade against the sun. They could look out through a breach in the parapet to Imbros and Samothrace, golden in a bright blue sea.

"God love us," said Deveney cheerfully, "but it's as good as a week-end at Rothesay!"

He tore a leaf from a note-book, wet a pencil in his mouth and, after heavy epistolary labour, pinned to the waterproof sheets the name of their home. "Argyll View," he called it fondly.

Thus they settled down in the trenches. Obviously it was safer and more comfortable up here than in the open ditches of Pink Farm. If the enemy was within hail, the fact was not of the kind that disturbed those artisans, whose imaginations did not range. Those huddled brown corpses on the slope behind they conveniently forgot. Having ascertained that nothing was expected of them in the meantime, but

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to be within call, the three friends disposed themselves to sleep.

They were wakened by the arrival of rations—tea and apricot jam and, a cheering sight, fresh bread. Along the trench came a corporal and two men who bore between them a large wooden box, from which these comestibles were doled out.

"Ye've forgot the beer, Corporal," said Deveney genially, "but I'll let ye aff if ye gi'e us a piece o' that lid."

He was handed a length of the precious wood.

"Come on, boys!" he cried eagerly to Col and John.

He was like a child at a picnic. With his bayonet he split the wood into small pieces and built a tiny fire in one of the chimneys in the trench wall. His pannikin he filled from their water-bottles and set it to boil over the little flames that were pale in the sunlight. He instructed John to cut the bread.

"This is the life, right enough!" he cried exultantly. It always pleased the soldier to achieve even a pale shadow of domesticity in the trenches. Deveney turned on Col. "Away you, Col, and see if ye can bag any water."

And Col wandered off. He found that the trench dipped down the side of a small nullah, and that in the bed of the glen there flowed a feeble rivulet. He filled two water-bottles down there and returned to Deveney.

"Good lad!" said Deveney. "We've enough noo for a Sunday School swarry!"

They had peace in which to eat their meal and shade from the sun. They had learned how to circumvent the flies, and now they realised clearly the need to

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watch every movement of those pestilential insects. In the shade, however, the flies were not so eager as usual. There was no fussing N.C.O. to check the amount of tea the soldier might drink. Col. John and Deveney enjoyed that leisurely meal. It gave them the illusory feeling that war was not such a dirty business after all. Over the loveliness of the view from the trench Deveney was inclined to be sentimental.

Still there came no hint that they would be called upon to work. That was surprising, a condition to which they were not yet accustomed. They had learned that the soldier in the field is subject to continual and apparently frivolous calls upon his service. To be free from such demands for three hours on end seemed miraculous. They set out cheerfully to explore the trench.

"Gees, ye could take the wife for a walk if ye liked," observed Deveney.

They saw how their comrades were placed, sat and smoked in various bays, borrowed matches here and a scrap of wood there, respectfully passed the time of day with their boy officer. It was all friendly and peaceful in the trench. No. 1 Platoon was at home, as it were. You could sit on the fire-step with a pal, indifferent to the ping of bullets overhead, and watch the sun go down behind Samothrace. One section had gathered in a bay to sing sentimental choruses.

Thus the three friends passed slowly along the line till they came down into the nullah on the left. They found there a machine-gun post, held by squat men of a Lancashire battalion. Here they stayed to gossip and drink tea. Through periscopes they

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peered over the barren stretch of ground in front and saw, without emotion, the white parapet of the Turkish front line. They saw the shoulder of Achi Baba rising behind and did not pause to consider its impregnability. They were curious only in regard to little things. The trivial novelties of trench life were enough for them. And it seemed a simple sort of business.

As they made their way back, however, Deveney turned aside to explore the brook from which Col had fetched water. Here they were hidden from the enemy's sight and in the dusk could walk by that mysterious stream that had come through the Turkish positions. Yet they went gingerly—and then they were stopped by Deveney's outstretched arms. He was peering at something which was lapped by the sluggish waters. He turned to Col.

"Was this the burn where you got that water, Col?" he whispered. And when Col nodded: "Jesus!"

It was just what they might have expected—a Turk, dead, bloated, with his black face in the stream. But the thing made the dusk horrible and sent them tip-toeing back to the security of the trench.

And when they had found their bay again, they had not time to settle down before a corporal came whispering, with orders that they were to fall in for fatigue.

They found the platoon assembled at the mouth of the communication trench. Shortly, in single file, they were following their subaltern down Regent Street. Each man carried over his shoulder, on the

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shaft of his entrenching tool, a dozen water-bottles. For the men in the line were thirsty, and the awful thirst of Gallipoli must be quenched. Food they might do without, sleep they might forego, but they could not play tricks with the demon of thirst that mocked them always.

They made good time down Regent Street. On the way they passed No. 2 Platoon, staggering back to the line with the rations. Men were bent under waterproof sheets that sagged with the weight of twenty loaves. Others were festooned with hams. Men in couples cursed the angular boxes of bully-beef they carried between them. At the end of the line came a man alone, trundling before him a great cylindrical cheese. A ricocheting bullet had punctured it, and the molten stuff inside was pouring through the hole in the rind. Jests passed between the platoons and jeers. Then the night came down between them. No. 1 Platoon went on in silence till they heard through the darkness of the nullah the throb of the gas-engine that forced the cold water of the lower strata up through the pipes of Romano's Well.

A corporal of sappers was in charge of the well. Quite alone, he sat beneath a tree and smoked philosophically, and they would hardly have realised his presence but for the glowing point of his cigarette. It was eerie down here in the open, with the five white crosses ghostly through the gloom. Col saw his young subaltern stroll across and throw the beam of his electric torch on one of those white sticks. Vacantly he watched the patch of white light. Then he jumped. Something had struck a discarded spade that lay at his feet.

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"Bullets—stray bullets," he heard Deveney say
"They're landin' a' round us."

Col began to understand why there were white crosses at Romano's Well. But his was not an imagination easily stirred. He bent to pick up from the wet ground a load of water-bottles that had been filled. Something fell heavily on his shoulder and knocked him over. He had to throw off that weight before he could rise. He heard a horrified voice whisper :

"Christ ! It's the officer . . . Quick ! "

They were round the body in a trice. The sergeant knelt and lifted a limp arm.

"All up ! " he said curtly.

They were silent. The situation was beyond them. Had it been one of themselves, they could have solved it quickly by adding a sixth cross to the group below the tree. But this was an officer . . . And they stood for a long time looking down at that still, boyish face.

"Ma wife wis in his mother's Sunday School class, too," said Deveney.

The corporal of the sappers broke into the circle.

"You lads 'ad better be gettin' along with that water," he said.

They pointed to the body, but the sapper did not appear to be impressed.

"Can't be 'elped," he said. "You can't 'ang abaht the well all night. They'll be waitin' for that water up the line."

It was so obvious that the water mattered a good deal more than the body of a boy. The sergeant made a decision.

"We'll take him back. The Captain'll know . . ."

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So they got a brown blanket, and two of them lifted the ends of the bundle, and they set off up Regent Street again. Col and Deveney were carrying the body between them when Captain Ogilvie came hurrying down at the bidding of a man who had run ahead with the news.

"What's all this?" he asked angrily. "Carting it up to the line again! Couldn't you bury it down there? O, damn"

The casualty had rattled him, and his anger was that of nervousness. He turned fiercely on the sergeant.

"Get it buried quick. Anywhere. Surely to Heaven . . . In there!" He pointed to a slit in the rear wall of the trench. "Then turn out your platoon, sergeant, for a digging party in front. Quick, now."

And he hurried away.

The grave of the subaltern had been a latrine, but they laid the brown bundle in there, among the filth and covered it over with earth. No service was read at that funeral, and Col and Deveney hastened over the task. The digging-party waited for them.

"Hurry up, there!" said Captain Ogilvie re-appearing.

They threw a couple of sand-bags on the pile and ran to get rifles and equipment.

"I suppose we'd best forget the wee lad," said Deveney as they struggled into the web straps.

One had to forget and let the dead past bury its dead. There were memories that could not be lived with In any case, the sergeant was always at hand with another job of work to be done. Endless jobs of work to be done, not always of obvious

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importance. But they kept a man from brooding. That night, however, while A Company lay out on the hillside digging, a rifle cracked and a boy squealed. When they got him in, his teeth rattled as he told of the accident: how his rifle lay by his side while he plied the entrenching-tool; how the blade of the tool skidded off a stone and hit the trigger. The doctor's eyes were steady on the twitching face.

"And you had your rifle pointing at your feet."

The doctor looked up at Captain Ogilvie and shrugged his shoulders.

"It won't do, sonny, you know," he said not unkindly.

The boy wept. Captain Ogilvie beckoned to a sergeant.

"Put this man under arrest," he said.

Col heard what the two officers said to each other.

"Quite deliberate, of course . . . Only a kid—not eighteen . . . it's a pity. But still there's discipline to consider . . ." Then the doctor's voice, earnestly.

"Well, I hope it doesn't mean a squad at dawn. There are nervous diseases, you know, Ogilvie . . ."

"Discipline . . ." enunciated Captain Ogilvie.

Deveney propounded the view of the rank and file.

"I'm sorry for the wee f'la," he said. "Still, he shouldn't ha' went and let doon the Company."

It was not merely that the pride of the Company was hurt. Men hated much more fiercely this open confession of a weakness that was potential in them all. It is awkward when pretences are broken down.

Still, there was duty to be done. Soldiers have to carry on, though there be nothing but death at the end of the road. When Col and John and Deveney got back to their trench again, the sleep into which

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they fell immediately was not suffered to last long. It seemed to Col that he had just closed his eyes when a rough hand gripped his shoulder and shook it.

"Come on, there ! Turn out, you boys, and stand to."

They did not quite understand. It occurred to them at once that the Turks had attacked. But the morning was calm and quiet. The corporal grinned at their blank faces.

"Stand to, I said," he repeated. "Ye've got to stand to arms at dawn and sunset."

"O, we have, have we !" exclaimed Deveney grimly.

It was a dreary half-hour. The sky was grey, and the air was chill, and it seemed that the world was empty. It is a horrible pain that gnaws at the midriff of a hungry, weary man in the morning hours. The blood throbbed in their heads ; their eyeballs seemed to burn. It was a struggle to keep awake, and it seemed an age before the word of release passed along the trench. They were too tired to remove the web equipment before they stretched themselves on the fire-step again.

Another brief hour of sleep, then the voice of authority once more.

"Come on, now ! Tumble out ! Get your breakfasts. Stand by for the rations."

Strong hot tea was welcome, but who could eat apricot jam at six in the morning or bully beef ? They made it up with cigarettes, and then they realised that supplies of tobacco were running short. There was little tobacco to be bought on Gallipoli. Men cherished Woodbines like golden sovereigns. A minor worry, but it mattered greatly in the trenches.

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Then they were called from breakfast to clean up the trench. The white dust on the floor of it had to be gathered and swept into the latrines. They picked up tins and scraps of paper and straws and burnt matches. Keen-eyed officers came and grumbled over a cigarette-end in a crevice of the boulder-clay.

"I doot the Captain's got a lady comin' up for tea," was Deveney's pleasantry.

It took hours to clean the trench. Came the Colonel, the Adjutant, and the M.O. to see that it had been well done. It was then that Col got into very hot water over the loss of the lid of his pannikin. The Colonel made him understand that he had grievously impaired the efficiency of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

The inspection over, they were marched off to fill sand-bags in a sap off Regent Street. Then the sand-bags had to be carried to the front-line. Half an hour for dinner—bully beef and tea and apricot jam—and they were off again to the dump at Romano's Well for heavy boxes of ammunition. They got sleep in the late afternoon, an hour or so, and slept heavily after the heat and labour of the day. Tea again—and a warning to be ready for Romano's Well once more. Rations and water again.

But they did it all cheerfully and bore with the monotony. Patience, willingness, good-humour, the capacity to endure—these lovely virtues were in the soldier. Often the impossible was asked of him, and always he tried to do it. Even when, after the heart-breaking job of getting the rations up Regent Street, after a day of strenuous labour under a blazing sun—when they were told that another spell

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of digging was before them, Deveney could crack his inveterate jest.

"I doot, Col," he said, "I doot if me and you's goin' to get to Rothesay this Fair Setturday."

CHAPTER XIII

TRENCH warfare in Gallipoli was no picnic, as Deveney observed, but there were times when apathy seemed to have descended upon the opposing armies. For lack of shells the artilleries were nearly silent for days on end. The crackling rifle fire of the Turks at night was merely monotonous. In the hours of daylight the rifles spoke but occasionally. Sometimes a machine-gun stuttered into momentary activity like the peppery outburst of a sullen old man. The snipers watched and fired at intervals. Once in a while an aerial torpedo hovered and fell with a crash. But it was casual warfare apparently—as if the soldiers kept up no more than a pretence of fighting. Sometimes the hot sun of early afternoon imposed on the parallel lines a silence complete.

Yet this appearance of inactivity was deceptive. If the armies did not meet in the loud clash of battle, they were watchful and alert behind the loopholes. It was a stalemate anxiously sustained, and the soldiers waited, waited till an accession of strength on one side or an apparent weakness on the other should bring the moment for action. Always the periscopes winked and flashed above the parapets by day; always the soldiers stood peering through the darkness, with eyes strained for a flicker of movement in the open. Those stern sportsmen, the snipers,

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watched always and aimed steadily, if it was only at the fall of a shadow across a loophole. Before it learned its business, the battalion lost two men who used the loopholes rashly and had their brains scattered on the floor of the trench.

Seemingly casual warfare—but it had to be paid for. Twice a day, at least, the sharp cry of "Stretcher bearers!" rang round the traverses. Once a well-timed burst of shrapnel lashed on a working-party at the dump; and five men went down Regent Street on stretchers, and two were buried hastily behind the reserve line. And the stretchers took away each day now one man, then two, who had suddenly weakened and staggered under the attack of dysentery.

The adaptability of men is wonderful, and these incidents held for the battalion nothing of the dramatic. Their job was to carry on and damn the expense of a war of attrition. They had plenty of work to fill the hours of each day, and when they did not need to work they needed all the sleep that they could get. Something definite would happen sooner or later. They would be relieved, rested, sent to another part of the line; they would attack or be attacked. Something would happen. New to the game, they sincerely hoped that their lot would be to charge the Turkish trenches with bayonets fixed. They felt that they could do something which other troops had failed to do.

It was not long before there reached them certain promises of action. Late one afternoon there burst out behind them the savage chorus of all the guns on Helles. Seventy Fives and eighteen-pounders barked and thudded. The heavier guns at the

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Cape boomed and crashed. From the sea came the metallic thunder of a monitor that had pushed into sight from behind Imbros. That hurricane of discharges, the fierce screaming of the projectiles overhead, and the thuds of the explosions over the Turkish lines made such an inferno of noise as the men had not dreamed to be possible. It delighted them to know that behind them stood an apparently solid mass of artillery. The sheer crude clamour of the bombardment excited them to a delight in destruction. Feverishly they watched the eruptions of earth and flames in the Turkish lines, and gloated over the sufferings of the enemy.

"There's a bellyfu' for ye!" they cried, as the shells from the monitor landed heavily. "Take that, ye swine!"

They crowded to the parapets against the orders of yelling officers. And then the Turks put down the barrage of shrapnel that sent them scuttling to the dug-outs and stretched some of them dead on the fire-step.

Exactly one hour the bombardment lasted. Its virulence was astonishing. Life became nothing but a clatter of sound; the world was wrapped in a thick blanket of thuds and screams and crashes. It seemed that the Turkish trenches opposite must be nothing but a welter of mangled bodies and broken earth. Then, suddenly, the guns ceased firing. A moment of ghastly silence, and the enemy machine-guns ripped out to meet the attack they expected. But there was no attack. Men were not altogether sorry when they heard how sharply the Nordenfelts could speak after the storm of fire that should have shattered them. They knew, however, that the

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attack was coming, and they made themselves ready for the bloody baptism of the assault.

A Company, in reserve, passed that night in heavy labour. They had to fetch water from Romano's Well, twice as much as they had ever carried before. Then they went down again for ammunition, and box after box, tens of thousands of rounds, were laboriously carried to the dump. Yet once more they were marched down Regent Street, and now they brought back with them strange engines of war—broad scaling-ladders like hurdles, drums of wire, picks and shovels and tools of a dozen kinds. The dump looked that night like the store of a shipyard, and men came to stare at its sinister contents.

Col and John and Deveney were near dead with fatigue when, long after midnight, they were suffered to turn in for sleep. There was that in their minds, however, which kept them up talking for a time. They spoke in whispers, and they did not smoke. For nearly an hour Deveney worked with his rifle. Carefully he cleaned and oiled the bolt, pulled through the barrel, tested the slide of the rear sight. Then he took his bayonet and burnished it in the dust of the fire-step till it gleamed in the starlight.

"That's that," he said at length.

Then he jerked a hand to draw the notice of his friends to what lay behind the parados. They looked out and saw down there, anchored off the Cape, three hospital ships, ablaze with lights of red and green. They had come like vultures to the fray, and there was no mistaking their significance.

"There'll be dirty work at the cross-roads the morn," said Deveney gravely. "We'd best sleep, ma lads."

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By the hammering of the guns they were wakened. Quickly they jumped from their blankets, alarm clutching at their throats. That clamour of explosion was so intense, it seemed that the moment for assault was at hand. Against a sky that was still dark they saw the quick, white flashes of bursting shells. Gripping their rifles, they waited the word to prepare.

But it did not come. There was silence in the trench. Crouching together, Col, Deveney and John felt that they were alone with the uproar of the guns. It was as if the battalion had charged and left them to hold by themselves a forsaken position. At length Deveney rose.

"I'll away and see what's doing," he said.

It surprised him to find in the next bay that a party of his comrades was still asleep. Asleep? In the faint light, huddled up against the cold of early morning, they looked like corpses. While he paused to peer at them, there appeared round the traverse the figure of Captain Ogilvie. To Deveney he seemed at that moment a terribly lonely man. The private soldier had a glimpse of the agonies of command. The officer's face was strained and white as he passed along the line at dawn to look at his sleeping men.

"Morning, sir," said Deveney quietly.

"Good morning!" The officer stopped and peered. "Oh, it's you, Deveney? You'd better go and sleep, lad."

A curious sympathy seemed to flow between them—as if, in the hour of imminent drama, the barriers of rank and caste and discipline were down between two men.

"Are we for it, sir?" asked Deveney.

"Yes. But not yet. This afternoon——"

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Captain Ogilvie recaptured the tone of authority. "Run away now, and sleep."

Deveney rejoined his friends. Burdened with sombre knowledge, nevertheless he kept it to himself. Kindly he spoke to Col and John.

"It's all right, boys. We'd best doss it out."

They slept. Even the thunder of the guns could not cheat them of the rest they needed so much. It was bright daylight when a breezy corporal turned them out for breakfast and told them that the sister brigade had attacked on the right at dawn.

Of that attack no reliable news was to be got, and those raw troops swallowed every mad yarn that rumour sent buzzing along the line. They believed for one hour that their comrades had broken through, that the Turks were cracking and fleeing, that Achi Baba was about to fall. Then the story was that the attack had failed, that three battalions of the Division had been shattered, that the trenches over the way were cluttered with the dead and dying. There was not among them the intelligence to deduce from the tempest of rifle-fire on the right that the usual had happened: that many men had died to take a stretch of Turkish trench, and that it was being desperately held by weary men against desperate counter-attacks. They could not reason that the captured trench was tactically useless and that, when this day was over, things would be much as they were before. They needed sensation, and, if the cold facts of war did not provide it, then they invented it.

Later in the day they saw some of the side-issues of battle. The front line cried for water, water, and two platoons of A Company trudged down Regent Street to Romano's Well. In the nullah there they

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saw the steady trickle of blood from the battlefield, the endless procession of stretchers moving down. Stretcher after stretcher: some with gay warriors who smiled and waved to them; some with men who groaned in pain; some whose burdens were silent and impassive as death itself. And at the Eski line they caught a glimpse of a dressing-station like a shambles, where doctors worked with blood-stained forearms and men with punctured stomachs babbled hideous hilarity under the influence of morphia.

"It's the mercy of God," said Deveney, "that the wife canna' see me noo."

Mercifully, they were kept busy through the day. In the afternoon they carried into the trenches the scaling-ladders they were to use. Then by irritable officers they had their kits, their rifles, and their rations inspected. Up came the ammunition, box after heavy box. And men were told what they had to do: how this little party would sling their rifles and carry picks and shovels; how some would go with the signallers and some with the bombs. All the curious detail of the assault they learned in half an hour. It was then the C.S.M. broke the news to Col that he was to remain behind and act as runner to the adjutant.

It nearly broke his heart. Col wept. He could not bear to think that John and Deveney must go into battle without him. It hurt his pride to be left behind, and he could not imagine what he would do without them. They were hard put to it to comfort him.

"Never you mind, Col," said Deveney. "You and me'll share a fine wee harem in Constantinople yet."

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But the pleasantry did not check the blubbing of Col. Captain Ogilvie paused in passing to look at this strange sight.

"What's wrong?" he asked sharply.

"He wants to go over wi' the boys, sir," Deveney explained.

Captain Ogilvie smiled.

"Tell him he's got . . ." he began.

And then the guns began to bark again. The bombardment came with the effect of a clap of thunder out of a blue sky. There was nothing to be done but listen to that overwhelming torrent of sound: to the incessant thud of the pieces behind, to the bedlam scream of the shells overhead, to the crashes of their bursting in the Turkish line, a hundred yards away. Men ceased to talk, gave up every attempt at conversational ease. This thunder implied so much; a man had to sit and think. It was coming at last, that culminating test of which they had talked and boasted and dreamed; and now that it was upon them, men paused for the first time to realise its grim and final implications. It was coming, coming. Inexorable.

The sombre mood gave way quickly to impatience. Now there was before them only one way of escape from brooding, and that was to make the reckless, mad plunge into the streams of bullets from the machine-guns. Would it never come, that moment of release from a tension intolerable? They placed the scaling-ladders in position, overhauled equipment, formed into files behind the men who were to lead them over the top. At length they saw their Captain place his foot on the bottom rung of a ladder

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and glance from his wristlet watch to the face of the C.S.M.

It was coming now. . . . But the moment did not come then. They waited—minutes, seconds, hours, an eternity. Nothing in the world but the overwhelming clamour of the guns. Col spoke to Deveney, but Deveney, tensely poised behind his corporal, did not answer, only stared straight into the corporal's back and grasped his rifle. A voice spoke, Captain Ogilvie's, hoarse and strange.

"Ready . . ."

Then, suddenly, the guns stopped firing, and silence fell like a blow. It lasted a second, but it was awful. Then it was shattered by a roar of cheering. Brown streams poured up the scaling ladders. At last! Over the top with the best of luck! Over and on, out of the prison of the trench! To hell with everything. . . .

His face streaming with tears, Col stood and yelled as his comrades clambered over the parapet and disappeared. Then he recovered to find himself in an empty trench, his helmet in his hand. They were gone—his brothers—John and Deveney and the rest. It was unbearable to be left behind.

He ran to a ladder and scrambled up till his head and shoulders were above the parapet. There they were, twenty yards across the open, trotting steadily into a haze of golden dust. Immediately they were swallowed up, as if they had been overwhelmed by a tornado of shot and shell. An explosion sent a scatter of dust and stones into Col's face. He fell back into the trench.

It took Col some time to realise that he had not been wounded, only stunned by the burst. Then it

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came over him that his friends could not live up there. The virulence of the Turkish defence astounded him. He had believed subconsciously that the British bombardment had wiped out every Turk before them—and now he had to listen to the hellish chorus of their machine-guns and the venomous swish of thousands of bullets overhead. The shrapnel burst and shrieked above him.

"John! John!" he cried.

The sound of his own voice steadied him. He found that he was angry—as if the enemy had meanly deceived him and betrayed his friends. They must all be dead. Blankly he looked round, and his attention was caught by movement on the slope on the other side of the nullah. He rose to his feet and cheered again, for he saw over there the advance of the sister battalion—three steady lines moving uphill. Now they were hidden in clouds of dust shot with the glare of shell-bursts, but always they emerged again and went on and on steadily. It was miraculous, inspiring, this triumph of his fellows over the ferocity of opposition. And he heard through the uproar the wild, reedy note of the bagpipe.

"Go on, boys! Go on!" he yelled in an ecstasy.

"Come on yourself," said a rough and worldly voice behind him. "Away to headquarters and report. Quick!"

The sergeant might as well have ordered Col to report at Troy. Where headquarters were established he had not the least idea. Of the baffling geography of the trench system he was almost completely ignorant. Regent Street he could have found, and he knew the general direction of the front line. But he had always depended for guidance in practical

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affairs on Deveney and John, and now without them he was lost.

He began to feel very lonely. The trenches hummed with purposeful traffic. Men moved quickly, some with ammunition, some with messages, many with tools. Staff Officers hurried up and down, and signallers worked frenziedly with the wires and buzzers of their craft. All this ant-like coming and going made sad confusion in the communication-ways.

"Out the light there!" men shouted at Col as, gawkily, he blundered into them. For minutes on end he could not proceed on his vague way, but had to dodge into saps while a party of sappers struggled up with a load of timber or the first stretchers of a long procession were borne down towards the dressing-stations. Once he waited thus while there filed past him a string of Turkish prisoners, meek and frightened men of middle-age. And while he waited there his attention was attracted to the storm of musketry and shell-fire that raged above ground, and he thought again, with desperate anxiety, of his friends.

He was spurred to go on and find them. The disciplinary necessity of reporting at headquarters forthwith did not affect his dogged desire to rejoin the Company. He forgot the order; and now he was obsessed by a private need. Through this welter of traffic he would find his way somehow. On and on he plodded towards the line of battle, pushing his way through the press as if his own affairs were just as significant as those of any Staff Officer hurrying to the General with a scribbled report on a bloodstained flimsy.

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No one sought seriously to divert him. Each hectically active man in those swarming lines of communication had an urgent job on hand. None paused to wonder how all those sporadic, fierce activities were being controlled and correlated. Each man carried on, and by the miracle of luck the ever-changing needs of the fighting-line were served. There was much to be done; so much that nobody paused to drag out of the main communication trench the body of a kilted soldier with a bloody, unrecognisable face. They stepped over that unimportant piece of battle's jetsam, and so did Col, intent on his own purposes. He satisfied himself by a glance that it was neither John nor Deveney.

Thus he went on till he came to a point in the old front-line where a party of Engineers dug furiously into the raw earth of a new sap. There Col stood aside for a moment, and wondered what he should do now that he had come to the edge of known territory. He could hear the battle raging beyond—the thundering barrage of the angry Turks and the crackle of rapid fire as the thin line of British troops withstood the counter-attack. And as he wondered how he could win to where his friends were fighting for their lives, he saw a lad, a boy of eighteen, carry a box of ammunition into the new sap, scramble up its rough face, and hurry away across the open. One of the sappers glanced up at Col.

"There's a lad for you," he said admiringly. "D.C.M. that youngster ought to get."

But Col had seen the way clear before him, and he prepared to follow the boy into the open. The sapper stared at him.

"You going too? Blimey!"

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"Message for the Captain . . ." muttered Col, forcing his way into the sap.

"No, you don't."

It was the sergeant of Engineers who had caught and held his arm. Col fought to shake himself free, but he was pulled back roughly into the trench.

"Dotty, ain't yer," growled the sergeant, glaring at Col. "Bloody fool! And don't you fight me, me lad, or I'll crack yer blinkin' skull with this 'ere shovel."

His fist shot out and, catching Col on the jaw, sent him reeling against the wall of the trench. When he recovered, Col saw that the sergeant had turned again to his feverish work in the sap. It was an amazing world. Col could not understand it. Reluctantly, his spirit bleak, he turned away down the communication-trench again.

Hardly had he gone twenty yards against the tide of traffic when he was pounced upon by the sergeant who had first ordered him to report at headquarters.

"Here you! Where the hell have you been? Lost yersel', eh?" He pushed Col before him down the trench. "You come along an' do a job of work."

They passed back to the old reserve line, and joined there a party of details that had gathered every water-bottle and tank available.

"Romano's Well," said the sergeant crisply, leading the way down Regent Street. "Come on, now, step it out."

So once again, heavily laden, Col made the long journey to the well in the nullah and up again in the gloaming. But it was for him a journey in a dream. He did not notice the loads he carried, he hardly

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glanced at the ghostly stretchers passing down to the base. Now he had an obsession: his desire, his passionate need to be with Deveney and John again. This hard, mechanical existence away from them had neither reality nor purpose. A thousand rebuffs from sergeant, colonel or general could not now affect his determination to rejoin his friends. As against his passion for the old companionship in which alone he was content, the whole disciplinary code of a nation at war meant nothing to him.

They regained the dump at last, and laid down their burdens. The sergeant led his party into the reserve trench.

"Ye'd best take a nap, boys. We're sure to be wanted later."

His eyes were burning, his head was buzzing with fatigue, but Col Macaulay was determined to disobey that order. He knew now that he would not be permitted to walk off on a quest of his own, yet he very deliberately intended, while making a pretence of lying down to sleep, to arise at the earliest possible moment and find his way to the front line in search of A Company. He had to use all his wits to keep awake. Continually the burdened, swollen lids fell over his eyes while consciousness slipped from his mind. Only a dour determination of his will kept him wrestling with overwhelming slumber. He kept his head on the shaft of his entrenching tool, his eyes on the stars.

There were no conspicuous noises to keep him awake. Like a fire that had burned itself out to a sad mouldering, the storm of musketry had died down to the faint crackling of normal times. The star-shells rose and fell mechanically as if their light

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did not fall on more pinched, dead faces than that hillside had ever seen. In the old reserve trench, away from the stir of Regent Street, and now four hundred yards from the firing-line, all was quiet as the tomb. Only one big gun behind boomed at regular intervals to remind the enemy that a vigilant army jealously guarded its trifling gains.

After a time, Col sat up to look about him. His comrades lay like the dead, pathetic in the immobility of oblivion. The sergeant lay near him, his mouth open, his breath whistling through the nostrils in the long rhythm of deep sleep. Gingerly, clasping his accoutrements to his body for fear that they might clatter, Col rose to his feet. He stood still for fully a minute. Then, moving like a conspirator in some ghostly affair of villainy, he began to pick his way over the bodies of his comrades.

He stopped short once when, nearing the communication trench, he saw in the darkness ahead the glowing point of a cigarette. Then his tinker's eyes made out the figure of a man in breeches, and he went on to pass a private of the A.S.C.

"Fine night, chum," said the private of A.S.C. quietly.

"Fine," answered Col and turned into the main roadway.

He could move quickly now, for the stream of traffic had thinned to a trickle. Only two stretchers passed him, moving downhill with their silent burdens. In one sap he saw a signaller talking earnestly into the mouthpiece of a telephone, a shaded lamp gleaming on the pad of pink flimsies on his knee. In another, one small, burly soldier, with rifle slung carelessly over his shoulder, was lighting a cigarette

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for a wounded Turk and addressing him cheerfully as "Johnnie." Ever and again men passed rapidly up the trench with boxes of ammunition.

Once only did Col find it necessary to slip into the dark shadow of a recess, and then it was when he saw approaching, ever so slowly, an officer supporting a wounded man. It was the Colonel who had been hit. He was naked to the waist. Blood streamed over his white chest from a raw hole below the left shoulder. His head rolled in a sickly sort of way, his eyes were glassy, and all his weight was on the doctor. A lump came into Col's throat when he heard the Colonel hiccup over the blood in his lungs.

That sight impressed him deeply. That the Colonel, the all-powerful and unapproachable deity of the battalion, should thus be reduced to a battered, helpless, pitiable piece of human wreckage—that seemed to Col to be an awful thing. It was like looking on at the public humiliation of one's grandmother, like surprising a hero in tears. The sight revealed to him the impartial and implacable destructiveness of war. From his recess Col watched the pathetic pair pass down the trench and out of sight.

Then his own private obsession drove out of his mind that cinematographic picture of degradation. John and Deveney were still to be found. Resolutely he pushed on towards the curtain of star-shells that rose and fell against the northern sky.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Col reached it at last, the sap he had seen begun in the afternoon had been made into a respectable trench, joining the old positions with those captured from the Turks. It was narrow and shallow, and it was but a precarious isthmus for the men who had taken the trenches beyond, yet its completion established definitely a conquest that was duly recorded in the newspapers of Great Britain.

"Keep your head down and run like hell," said a sapper to Col as the latter went striding towards the line.

It was really necessary to run as the sapper had suggested. Between the old line and that which had been taken, the floor of the new trench rose till it was barely two feet below the level of the open ground. Here the sappers still laboured hectically under the stars, and again Col was bidden to keep his head down and run like hell. And he did run over that dangerous peak, the bullets whining near his bowed head. But his haste was due not so much to a lively sense of danger as to his anxiety to reach his friends and his gladness at having escaped from ignominious labour in the rear. He believed himself to be on the point of rejoining John and Deveney. That was all he sought to accomplish.

So he came through the sap to what had been the

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Turkish front-line. It was now a battered, shapeless ditch ; shell-fire had broken down its sand-bagged walls and covered its floor with debris. And it was apparently deserted. The empty silence of that captured trench was appalling. Col had expected to rejoin here a cheerful battalion in possession of its gains. He found instead a place from which humanity had fled as if in horror.

It frightened him a little. It was eerie, this derelict ditch with its ghostly, battered traverses, its darkness, its stale smell of blood and humanity. For a moment Col believed that he had missed his way and stumbled into an abandoned section of the Turkish line. Then, while he paused to consider what he should do, he heard a man whimper near him. The noise startled him, but at least it was human, living. He advanced to the place from whence it had come, and found himself looking into the tearful face of the signalling sergeant.

The signalling sergeant had been wounded. In answer to Col's question he held out a shattered forearm. That object he extended as if it was something foreign to his body, as if he held out on a plate for inspection a thing of horror and pity. Plainly it amazed the sergeant that his body should have been the object of mutilation. His wet, affronted eyes appealed to Col.

" It's dam' silly, isn't it ? Isn't it, now—dam' silly ? Smashed a fellow's arm . . . "

He was dazed by the calamity and quite overwhelmed by the righteousness of his self-pity. Loss of blood and shock had made him silly. There was nothing else in the world for him but his shattered forearm. Again he appealed to Col.

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"Smashed a fellow's arm! It's not fair . . . Smashing a fellow's arm like that."

But Col was not concerned with the sergeant's misfortune. He had his own troubles. A man had to look after himself. Without a word to the unhappy sergeant he turned away along the trench and started to scramble over a barrier that he found in his way.

It was while he was passing over the barrier that he paused to wonder why such an obstruction should be there. It was a strange pile on the floor of the trench. Not sand-bags—for his boots slipped in a curious way, as if he was walking on seaweed. There rose to his nostrils a musty, sweaty smell. He bent down to touch what was beneath his feet, and his fingers recoiled from contact with cold flesh. Dead Turks. Dead Turks in a solid block, four feet deep. A shell had caught them, or the implacable bayonets of his comrades. Now they cluttered the trench like so many sand-bags.

Col hurried from that spot. Turning a corner, he ran into a sort of clearing, and in the middle of the clearing lay a dead man. He lay with arms and legs splayed out flat against the ground. His face was white, and there was a gash in his throat. It was not the mere presence of death that scared Col, but the loneliness of the corpse, the futility of its appeal to human charity. Somebody might at least have thrown a waterproof sheet over that white face. But men were concerned with more important things. Corpses did not matter. A burial party would attend to the refuse in a day or two. . . . Col conquered his morbid desire to stare at the dead man and went on.

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He passed up what had been the Turkish communication-trench. This thoroughfare was also empty of life. He saw in dark corners huddled things that had lately been living men, but otherwise the place was stagnant and empty. At the junction of a transverse trench he saw a kilted soldier, stretched out on the fire-step, snoring; he seemed to be the lonely and indifferent guardian of the captured sector. For a moment Col paused to wonder if he really ought to go on through this maze of death. It was his faith in A Company that kept him trudging forward.

At last he came upon the battalion, as much as was left of it. The communication trench opened out to join what had been the Turkish third line, what was now to be made into the front-line of the British Army in Gallipoli. It was a shallow trench, and the side next the enemy was low, hardly breast high, much lower than the wall to which the victorious troops had their backs. Still, there was here no sign of the feverish activity of consolidation. Col's first sight was a group of men seated on the floor of the trench, their heads in their hands. As he approached one, an officer, looked up wearily, but did not speak. The expression of his face explained that he was weary beyond curiosity, almost to the point of complete indifference to what might happen at dawn. There were dark rings round his heavy eyes, and his mouth hung slackly agape. Before Col had passed him, the officer's head had fallen forward between his legs once again.

Col saw at once that the line was thinly held by bored and weary men. Most of them slept, hopelessly, their backs against the wall of the trench.

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In the dim light of early morning they made a pitifully sordid spectacle, worse than dead in their weary indifference. Col walked among them till he came to a sergeant who leaned over the parapet above his rifle, his glazed eyes gazing into the darkness.

"Where's A Company?" asked Col.

Slowly the sergeant took his eyes from the mystery of the open and turned them laboriously on Col.

"Where's the bloody battalion, if it comes to that?" retorted the sergeant sluggishly.

He returned to his watch on the darkness, and though Col spoke once again, it was like addressing a stone-deaf man. Col passed along the line, peering anxiously at the sleepers and the hypnotised sentries. Men of B Company and men of C Company he recognised, but not a comrade of his own. And though he spoke to many, reiterating his stupid, anxious question, he got nothing but curses in reply when he got anything at all. The few who remained awake in that precarious position were obsessed to the point of stupefaction by their dreadful responsibility.

At length Col reached an emplacement in which the battalion machine-gunners had established themselves. It was like walking into another world, so vivid and alert were the men behind those deadly engines. The tall officer of the section strolled up and down his small section of trench, his hands in the pockets of his breeches. In the shadow behind the guns a man sang softly, "Sprinkle me with kisses . . ." And the voice of another spoke facetiously.

"Shut your mouth, you fool, or ye'll get dam' well sprinkled with shrapnel."

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A low laugh passed round the circle. The machine-gunners were a self-possessed and cheerful body.

"Where's A Company?" asked Col, blundering into the emplacement.

The tall officer loomed out of the darkness and stood over him. He smiled.

"A Company?" repeated the officer "In Constantinople, my lad."

"I'm looking for John MacLeod," said Col doggedly.

The machine-gunners tittered. "Good old Loonie!" cried one satirically. The tall officer was more tolerant.

"You won't find John MacLeod to-night, lad. Better wait till the morning, and we'll see what we can do for you."

The kindness of the tone impressed Col. His simplicity gathered from it that, when morning came, the officer would put him in the way of finding John. His trust was complete. He believed that the officer knew exactly where A Company lay. Glad to be at rest, he took the rifle from his shoulder and lay down. At once he fell asleep.

The toe of a boot in his side wakened him again.

"Stand to!" said the voice of the officer, stern now.

The grey of the morning had crept into the trench. Col saw himself surrounded by men with pallid faces on which the young beards showed like smears of dirt. The rims of their eyes were red and raw-looking against the dirty pallor of their cheeks. Now they all peered anxiously over the low and broken parapet. Col heaved himself up and looked over.

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So he saw the uplands of Gallipoli in the dawn. Before him, the ground sloped slightly downwards to a little hollow, then rose again till the skyline was level with his eyes. There were some small trees on the ridge before them, but otherwise that shoulder of the hill was bare. The Turks were up there, for on the crest ahead there gleamed a scar of fresh-turned earth, and men whispered to each other that they saw movement against the livid sky of early morning. The soldiers behind the machine-guns swivelled and aimed their weapons in a tentative way.

"Steady on," said the tall officer, "I'll give you the word."

Col did not see these preparations ; he did not hear the officer speak. All his attention was concentrated on a body that lay flat against the slope ahead. It was the body of a Highlander, a short, stocky man. It was spread-eagled ludicrously, the arms and legs pathetically stretched at angles to the sturdy trunk. One knew that the face of it was pressed into the ground. And as he peered, fascinated, at that lone and pitiful relic of the battle, it came into Col's mind with the fatal force of certitude that there lay the body of John MacLeod. . . . Whimpering with excitement, he made ready to go over and bring in his friend.

Perhaps he would have done so ; but a sharp crack, like a whip's lash, seemed to strike him in the face. There was a grunting sigh, then a thud. Col turned round to see lying in the trench beside him, face upwards, a dead man. There was a blue hole in his forehead ; the back of his skull had fallen out, and he lay in his brains. ^h :

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"Sniper!" yapped the tall officer, crouching by a gun. "Put a dose into those trees."

The machine-guns kicked and spoke. From one of the trees on the skyline there dropped a black parcel.

"That's that," said the officer grimly. He turned then and looked at the fallen man. "Better get him out the way," he added gently.

Col turned to help, but he had no time to do more than place his hands under the dead man's armpits, for simultaneously there burst over the trench a storm of shrapnel. The little bullets whined and pattered—a man squealed—but every other soldier jumped to the harsh, peremptory voice of the officer.

"Stand to! They're coming!"

That danger was somehow more imperative than the blatter of shrapnel overhead. They were to be attacked, and the men turned automatically to meet the needs of the moment. Their heads down to the sights of their rifles, they lay across the sand-bags and intensely watched the skyline. The steady voice of the officer came to them as from afar.

"Two hundred yards. Watch your sights. Aim low. Steady now—here they come." Then, in a sort of exultant scream: "Rapid—Fire!"

Bobbing heads appeared over the skyline. Along the trench the fire broke out like a fabric being ripped by a giant. It was fiendish, that clamour of musketry from men stirred to ferocity by the need to defend themselves—a roaring crackle, a cataract of sharp sound. Above the diapason, the harsh voices of the machine-guns spoke imperatively.

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Then the shells came over from the Seventy Fives and screamed on their way to burst above the unfortunate Turks. It seemed as if the British line, stirred in its sleep of weariness, had been stung into incredible anger by the counter-attack.

While they fired till the heated barrels burned their fingers, men watched that pitiful attempt of the Turks to retake the ground they had lost. When the horde of them came over the crest of the hill and met the torrent of lead from the British line, it hesitated oddly. Col saw an officer in green flamboyantly wave a sword, run forward, then halt and turn as if to upbraid reluctant men. For a length of time the attack halted there and faltered hysterically. The shrapnel was raging over it, and the officer with the sword suddenly disappeared. Then the heads began to bob again . . . then they vanished. In defence the most stubborn soldier in the world, the Turk had failed once more in the attack.

"That'll do," said the officer quietly.

As swiftly as it had arisen, the storm of rifle-fire abated, and the silence that followed was complete.

"Well, we've at least seen the blighters," said a machine-gunner cheerfully.

"Better clear up now," said the officer. "They'll not try that on again."

He turned to survey his men. Col saw his eye upon him. He wondered if he was to be sent back.

"Hullo, you're hit!" said the officer, and when Col stared, "Your wrist, man."

Col looked at his left wrist as at an object of general curiosity. The blood from a tiny wound on the back

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of it streamed over his hand. Col licked it clean.

"Pach!" cried the officer. "Come here!"

He ripped the first field dressing from the lining of Col's tunic and swiftly bound up the wound.

"A splinter of shrapnel," said the officer. "There you are. Like to go down?"

"Och, that's nothing," replied Col.

Immediately a spasm of dizziness overtook him. He staggered, then sat down on the floor of the trench.

"You'll go back at once, my lad," said the officer with a smile.

The threat was distressing to Col. He remembered suddenly the spread-eagled figure on the hillside. That, he felt, he could not leave. He was alone in the world. Deveney had disappeared into the blue; and there was John lying dead on the slope. Without these two he was lost and hopeless, and his simplicity had to cling to his fanciful association with the useless body out there. It was all he had left to him of reality.

"No, no!" he cried against the officer's order. The latter smiled.

"I think you ought to do what you're told," he said.

Just then, two men of the R.A.M.C. came down the trench with a stretcher between them. The officer halted them and pointed to Col, who rose sullenly.

"Put your good hand on my shoulder, chum," said the rear man of the stretcher party.

Thus, dazed and sorrowful, Col was led out of the shallow ditch he had helped to hold. He went reluctantly but yet mechanically, for now he was a

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little sick, and his arm had begun to throb. Nobody had thought of making him sling it; it was not in Col to think of that expedient for himself, and the blood beat angrily in the hanging limb. He went like a hurt child in the wake of the stretcher, and did not know how they steered through the maze of trenches or where. He was thinking of John MacLeod. If he had to endure this necessity to go down the line, he did not doubt but that he would again escape authority and find his way back to the front.

It was a slow journey to the dressing-station, for those captured trenches that had been still and dark the night before were brisk now with the traffic of morning. Two saps between the old and new positions had been completed, and there came swarming up to the front the scores of sappers and signallers and pioneers who were to make those battered ditches secure. They came cheerfully, proud of the conquest, whistling and calling to each other in the early sunlight.

Against that flowing stream of workers, there ebbed another much less brisk, for the stretcher-bearers had been busy all night collecting wounded in the open. Now, after lying for hours under the stars, those who had survived were being taken down to the dressing-stations. They went slowly, for a stretcher is an awkward thing in a trench. The bearers, stripped to singlet and shorts, glistened with sweat. Often they had to lay their burdens down while they dried the perspiration from their hands. Again and again they were held up while a working party filed past, or a string of sheepish prisoners was led down the line. It was nearly an hour before Col reached the dressing-station in the old support line.

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He saw many strange things on that slow journey, more than his dazed brain could take in. Mainly he got a confused impression of haste and movement and intolerable heat. His head throbbed ; his eyes burned with the sun-glare. He wanted to be sick, and he could not be sick. He was dead weary. But he saw some strange things. Once they were halted to let pass a string of prisoners—fair, plump men, not at all like Col's vague preconception of the lean and swarthy Turk. It was during this halt that his eyes fell on the prone figure on the stretcher he had followed.

It amazed him. It was the body of a fat man of fifty or thereabouts, nude save for a blanket over his middle and a helmet over the face. A fat, slack body, entirely ludicrous on the field of battle. There were several wounds on it, one in the side below the heart, two in the chest, two in the shoulder. About each was a smear of brown, dried blood. Col could not help thinking of the bullets lying cosily in the fat of this obese man. That fatness of maturity held even Col's slow imagination. This had been, at home, a solicitor, a prosperous man of business, with a wife and family ; and it was pitifully indecent that his battered carcase should be exhibited thus. It was out of place.

"Major of the H.L.I.," said the stretcher-bearer brightly to Col. "Copped a proper dose of shrapnel, 'e did."

He wiped his palms on the seat of his shorts, stooped for the handles of the stretcher, and they moved off once again. Slowly they went down one of the new saps and paused for a breather in the old front-line.

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It was there that Col found the body of Deveney. It hung down over the parapet of the trench, and one pendant hand still gripped the rifle. Nobody had found time to bring the body down. It just hung there, useless and neglected. Even Col hardly noticed it until the stretcher-bearer pointed and spoke conversationally.

"That poor bloke's copped it all right. 'Ope they get 'im buried before 'e stinks."

Col looked, saw a cloud of flies over the hanging head, then felt the clutch of fear at his heart. The face was turned down toward the wall of the trench, but he knew those shoulders and neck, the shape of that head, even the light colour of the wood of Deveney's rifle. A queer little cry escaped him. He stood up quickly, and the violent action made him dizzy, so that he had to clutch at the fire-step.

"Hullo! Feelin' queer, chum?" said the stretcher-bearer. "Come on, then. Lift . . ."

And Col had to follow down the communication-trench. But he wanted to go back and stay with Deveney, to be near his friend again.

"All right, chum," the stretcher-bearer comforted him. "You lean on me, good and 'ard. We'll soon be there."

The dressing-station was in a bay of the old support trench, and it was full when they reached it, so that Col and the fat man had to wait while the queue of wounded edged slowly towards the over-worked doctors. The fat man lay silent and still, mysterious under the helmet that covered his face, but the mass of his hairy stomach rose and fell reassuringly. Dully while he waited Col watched the traffic up and down the communication-trench. He sat on the fire-step

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beside a cheerful soldier, who handed to the weary travellers cups of tepid water from a camel-tank.

Turkish prisoners came down in single file, paused obediently by the camel-tank, drank their cups of water, nodded gratefully, and passed on. There came a Turkish officer, a wizened, dark little man in bottle-green, with half his right ear hanging ragged. He drank gratefully, and when the soldier pointed sympathetically to his damaged ear, shook his head sadly and passed on. Men continually passing: sappers, signallers, staff officers, orderlies, till Col's head swam. Somebody passing hailed him loudly.

"Haw, Loonie! Got a blighty?"

But he did not see who it was, and he did not care. He was indifferent to his own body, his own fate. His mind had yet to accommodate itself to the loss of his friends, to the wreck of the whole scheme of his existence. Actively he desired only that he should pass quickly through the doctor's hands. Then he would go back to look for John MacLeod. By that mad but dogged volition his mind was absolutely possessed.

Slowly the queue of wounded moved towards the bay in which the doctors worked, but Col had to wait a long time before anybody took notice of him. They were dealing with the gravely-wounded first. Col saw the fat man borne round the traverse on his stretcher; then another serious case arrived and preceded him into the bay. He waited, and the time seemed very long. The sun had risen high to blaze on the white dust of the trenches. The flies were busy over the blood of the dressing station. Col fell

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asleep. He did not waken properly until the surgeon was tearing the bandage from his wrist, and even then he hardly took in what was being mumbled over his wound by a tired man.

"Splinter of shrapnel . . . Nothing much. Lucky . . . They'll take it out at the base. . . . Right down on the ulna, but nothing much. Lucky . . ."

A part of Col's mind was listening to something else, to a voice that droned and babbled near at hand. For a time he could not relate that voice to anything material. Yet it spoke of things familiar and redolent.

"Any more for any more? . . . C'mon boys! Any more for any more? Who's for a bottle of ginger? . . . Whiter than the whitewash on the wall."

The voice began to sing drunkenly.

"Whiter than the whitewash on the wall. Wash me in the water . . . Any more for any more? . . ."

A voice from the past. Col could not place it. He looked round and saw a form on a stretcher, the form of a broken man with eyes unnaturally bright. Then he had it. Johnnie Foster, Cults Farm—Johnnie Foster and his dry canteen. And here lay Johnnie Foster dying in delirium! The doctor intercepted Col's stare.

"Poor chap!" he said, jerking his head. "Bullet in the spine. Not a ghost of a hope . . . That's morphia for you."

He tugged at the knot of Col's bandage, stood up and spoke briskly.

"There you are! You'll be right as a trivet in a week. You can walk down to the base, can't you? Off you go, then."

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Col walked away along the trench. That the doctor expected him to walk down to the base hospital he recognised very clearly, but he could only think of the suggestion as utterly ridiculous. He was going back to find John MacLeod—that had to be done. When he reached the communication trench again, he turned uphill. He had his plans. His slow wits had been sharpened by the overwhelming power of his need to reach his friend.

The old front-line was practically empty. Along that deep ditch he walked until he found a bay unoccupied. Then he sat down on the fire-step and methodically removed the sling the doctor had made him. The spare bandages he stuffed into his haversack. That done, he stretched himself out and fell asleep. He knew that his return to the firing-line in daylight would be observed. That he was a deserter from his regiment did not trouble him in the least.

His sleep was undisturbed throughout the afternoon, but it was broken in the early evening by the roar of gun-fire. Col sat up then and ate a hard biscuit that remained in his haversack. Patiently he sat there till the sunlight turned to gold and the chill of evening invaded the trench. Then he made himself ready to move, and, when dusk came, passed out of the trench on his way to the front.

He moved quickly, as one having business in the firing-line. His chief fear was that a vigilant officer would hold him up. As he approached the new trenches he saw that a subaltern sat on the fire-step facing him, and his heart fell. The officer's eyes were steady on his face; they looked a question—but the officer did not speak. Col passed him hurriedly

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and mingled with the indifferent men who held the line.

He looked for a place where the parapet was still low, and having found one, peered through the gloaming towards the lone figure that lay spread-eagled on the slope beyond.

CHAPTER XV

THE last glimmer of sunset over Greece faded and died, and the dark curtain of the night fell on the Peninsula. Like fireflies, the star-shells came out to soar over No Man's Land. Along the Turkish trenches there ripped the crackle of musketry that was to last till dawn. When these sights and sounds assured him that the vigil of the darkness had begun, Col Macaulay edged quietly along the trench till he came to the mouth of a sap that ran out towards the open. Pausing there, he looked anxiously about him, but no living soul was near, save a sapper who slept on the fire-step near at hand. His head down and stealthily, Col passed into the maw of the sap.

It was a narrow trench, part of the old Turkish system, which the victorious troops had not yet barricaded properly. It was easy for Col to surmount a low pile of sand-bags that had been thrown carelessly across the ditch, and then he had the mystery of the unexplored trench before him. That he did not intend to penetrate. It would assuredly have led him into the Turkish lines, and that was not the intention which governed his actions. What he meant to reach lay in the open, on the cold hillside above. So when he came to a place where a shell had made a scoop in the wall of the trench, he clambered up the crumbling slope and crept out on his stomach over the scrub of the uplands.

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He was going to find John MacLeod. John MacLeod, all that was left to him of the world, lay up there below the dark crest of the ridge, and it was necessary to reach him. It was an overwhelming necessity, an obsession. Whether or not he had saddled himself with the mere task of bringing the body in, Col did not pause to consider. He was irresistibly impelled to reach it, and to that vague end all his will and energy and cunning were being directed.

The practical side of the exploit presented no difficulties to him. He had the peasant's sense of direction and the cat's eyes of the tinker. From the trench through which he had escaped his course lay obliquely, slightly to the East of North, across the hollow and up the slope. He had in his mind's eye a bearing from a certain group of wind-contorted trees on the crest of the hill. Slowly he crawled, but without hesitation, to where he believed his friend was lying.

It was hard going, and the scrub scratched and stung his bare knees, but he had no consciousness of the pain. His pack he had left behind; his rifle was with him, but he did not notice its weight and awkwardness. He went on steadfastly. The bullets that shrieked through the air above him his concentration ignored. Only the star-shells made him pause, for the strength of his purpose had stimulated all his cunning. He was vividly alive. Actually a feeling of exhilaration came over him, some atavistic joy in danger, as he piloted his way over the dark and silent mystery of No Man's Land.

Only once did alarm and doubt clutch at his throat. It was dark in the hollow, and as he lay quiet to draw

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breath for the ascent of the slope, the light of a star-shell shone on a dead face near him. It was a face he knew—the quiet face of a boy, an officer of B Company. It was not buried in the scrub, but lay with its cheek to the ground as if pillowed in immutable comfort on the bosom of a mother. That pitiful revelation shook Col out of his fixity of purpose for a trembling moment. Then the star-shell died and the face vanished. Col turned to his task and went on.

Now it was difficult, for the hillside sloped more sharply than he had guessed, and the crest he had studied from the front-line was out of sight. He steered approximately; he began to pause more frequently, doubting. Soon he observed that the angle of the slope had put him off the line, that he had curved instinctively too far to the right. A glimmer of confusion invaded his mind. He lay flat so that he might see the silhouette of the crest against the ink-blue sky. To the right he saw the flashes from the British rifles. But——

A sort of mound ran across the ground before him, and he recognised it as the rough parapet of a new trench. It was a trench he had not observed before. He realised that he had lost his exact bearings. Thoughtlessly he raised his head and shoulders to see if he could pick up beyond the false skyline the group of trees by which he steered. Behind him a rifle cracked venomously. Col felt himself thrown violently to the ground. Something burned damnably in his back . . .

He wept, for he realised quickly that he had been hit. The agony of the wound was excruciating, but it was the abysmal shock of frustration that overwhelmed him first.

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"John! John!" he cried.

Then the burning in his back obsessed him. He tried to move forward, as if he might crawl away from that agony, but he dragged himself no farther than a couple of yards. The burning pain could not be evaded; he turned to wrestle with it. A violent twist threw him on his back, and he saw the dim stars. The wound hurt less when he was in that position, and he lay still, his teeth clenched, his arms rigid by his side. Soon he knew that he was lying in his own blood, which was warm against his skin. Again he tried to move, and it was as if a red-hot iron had been drawn across his spine.

He yelped at that swift agony, then lay moaning. Once again he opened his eyes, and now the stars seemed to be wheeling in large and sickening curves about the sky. . . . He felt himself being gradually enveloped by a black mist, and willingly he gave himself into its oblivion.

. . . He saw a face above him, a round, fair, spectacled face. Now the sun shone brilliantly. Voices were about him. Firm hands took him and began to turn him over. He saw the wall of a trench. But it was agony to be turned. The black mist came over him again. A pungent, heavy ether invaded his nostrils.

"John!" he murmured. . . .

When next he awakened, it was to find himself staring at stretched canvas and to feel the stabbing of his wound as his body was jolted by the rolling of a vehicle over a rough road. Ambulance—his mind figured that out clearly enough. And it was still daylight, for the taut canvas glowed with the sunshine behind it. He rolled his eyes and encountered

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the face of a Turk, the brutally stupid, brown face of a man of fifty. This man's dull eyes watched him ; his mouth hung agape below a dragged moustache. He wore a shabby uniform and a battered fez of astrakhan. A rifle stood between his knees.

" John ! " murmured Col.

But the Turk did not move. Only his eyelids blinked occasionally. He was stupid or indifferent, or both. Col closed his eyes. That he had been taken prisoner did not disturb him. He had nearer pains than that ; he was weary. All he wanted was to lie and rest.

The ambulance jogged on. Sometimes Col dozed, but ever and again he was jolted into consciousness by the heaving of the wheels over ruts. Hours and hours of it, as it seemed. Whenever he looked up he saw the vague, boorish eyes of the Turk upon him. He had glimpses of the road through the curtains at the rear of the ambulance and saw the flash of sunlight outside. Then he would doze again.

At length he was wakened abruptly by the pounding of a motor-cycle on the track behind the vehicle. He heard shouting. His Turkish gaoler rose to thrust his head between the curtains. The ambulance stopped. And while he was left alone, Col heard above the fervour of conversation at his ear the distant booming of guns, even the far, faint crackle of intense rifle-fire. A battle had broken out back there on the other side of Achi Baba. It sounded stupendous at a distance.

Suddenly the curtains were drawn apart, and Col blinked as the sunlight flooded the shadowed cabin where he lay. His Turkish gaoler clambered in again ; another Turk stood at his feet and pulled.

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The stretcher was carried out into the full glare of daylight and laid by the side of the track. Gently enough but hastily, Col was lifted from it and dropped on the rough grass. He heard the clatter of the stretcher being replaced in the ambulance. He heard shouting, the crack of a whip, and a rumbling of wheels as the vehicle was driven back at a gallop to where the big guns pounded and boomed in the distance.

He found himself looking on the sea. It glittered in the sunlight, and beyond it lay the golden hills of Asia. Lovely hills they were, like the hills of Scotland in the sweet summer. A white village sprawled above the Hellespont, and to the drowsy eyes of Col it was like a village he knew at home. As he lay there passive, gazing over the sparkling strait, he believed that he was back again in the Isles. War and battles and his recent ardours passed from his tired mind. He remembered his mother. And "John! John!" he murmured.

The thin stream of traffic on the road he ignored, as he was ignored by it. Motor-bicycles raced past, and an occasional car. For the rest they were limber-wagons that lumbered along the road, and though the drivers looked curiously at the tall exotic figure stretched by the way, they did not stop to help. The guns were calling, and the appeal of a wounded prisoner at the roadside was nothing to those who served them. Col was alone with his misty thoughts. There was little that could come now between him and those dim, fond visions of his weakness.

The golden hills and the white houses across the shining strait—they stood for him as a bit of Scotland. He was back in the Isles again, a child. To the

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empty air he babbled the things that came up out of ancient memory, his pain and his failure for the time forgotten. Mercifully he did not know that he lay forsaken and unutterably pitiful in an alien land, in the hands of enemies. It came into his mind that Colin Macvicar would come with the ferry-boat to take him across the water to that other friendly shore. He was patient, waiting.

The sun went down behind Achi Baba. Its level rays lingered wistfully on the slopes of Lapsaki, but a chill air of evening crept up the straits. Col shivered, and the discomfort brought him a brief consciousness of his misery. He struggled to move, to sit up and call for help, but the effort weakened him, so that he was fain to fall back and let the black mist creep over him again.

So he died.

And it did not matter very much. He was only one of the millions who died so. The British Army was one rifle the less. An old woman in Benbecula went on wondering if her son would ever return. Kirsty Galbraith got a line from the Records Office and drew a gratifying sum in cash from the national funds. The memory of Col does not trouble her at all.

Even John MacLeod had none of his luck. John had not died in battle—it was not John's body that Col went out to find. John lived to fight through the years until, at Cambrai a month before the Armistice, a bullet blinded him, so that now he plays the pipes for pennies in the streets of Glasgow. . . .

It did not matter very much that Col Macaulay at length lay dead under the alien stars.

